

## **Rehabilitation Medicine: Bridging Health, Independence and Wellbeing**

Rehabilitation medicine is a specialist field of medicine that performs a pivotal role in improving the lives of individuals experiencing both temporary or permanent disability. The specialty promotes restoration of an individual's ability in physical, functional and psychosocial domains with the ultimate goal of assisting each individual to pursue their chosen lifestyle with independence and dignity. In Australasia, practitioners of rehabilitation medicine are known as rehabilitation medicine physicians; a term used synonymously with physiatrists in other parts of the globe.

### **Key Aspects of Rehabilitation Medicine:**

1. **Patient Focus:** Rehabilitation physicians adopt a patient-centred approach, with the individual at the centre of the rehabilitation process. Management decisions are always formed with respect to the unique needs, beliefs and circumstances of every individual.
2. **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Alongside responsibility for medical care, rehabilitation physicians work together with a wide array of expert healthcare disciplines to assess and manage health conditions that affect an individual's function and wellbeing at nearly every stage of life.
3. **Patient Advocacy:** Rehabilitation physicians champion gold-standard care for individuals living with disabilities and actively support their rights to optimal medical, restorative and supportive care. A rehabilitation service also addresses an individual's needs after hospitalisation and coordinates ongoing rehabilitation needs. Whether the goal is to return to work, competitive sport or important family and life roles, rehabilitation teams are experts at incorporating these goals into supports and therapies.
4. **Professional Role:** Rehabilitation physicians work across clinical and academic areas to develop and apply optimal standards of care built upon principles of evidence-based medicine.
5. **Breadth of expertise:** Rehabilitation medicine is instrumental to addressing functional reduction associated with various conditions including:
  - Neurological disorders including congenital and acquired brain and spinal cord injuries
  - Cardiopulmonary rehabilitation and complex rehabilitation after surgery or critical illness
  - Paediatric and adolescent rehabilitation
  - Amputee and rehabilitation after multitrauma
  - Complex pain, neuropsychiatric and functional neurological conditions

As part of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP), the Australasian Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine (AFRM) oversees the expert training and practice of rehabilitation physicians in Australasia. The Rehabilitation Medicine Society of Australia and New Zealand (RMSANZ) is a non-profit, non-government organisation (NGO) composed of rehabilitation trainees and physicians and seeks to promote advances in rehabilitation medicine, continual professional development and advocacy for developments in optimal care for individuals living with a disability. Rehabilitation medicine in Australia has strong ties with international groups such as the International Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (ISPRM).

At its core, rehabilitation medicine exemplifies values of compassion, collaboration and continuous improvement in order to enrich the lives of all individuals, of all abilities. It is an indispensable segment of healthcare and promotes alliances amongst government, NGOs, corporations, organisations representing the interests of persons with disabilities and the wider community.

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## **A Spotlight on the Cairns Rehabilitation Service**

Nestled in the tropical paradise of Far North Queensland, Cairns Base Hospital (CBH) is a cornerstone of the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service (CHHHS). Uniquely, it hosts the only dedicated public rehabilitation centre that serves a region extending across two World Heritage sites - the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree Rainforest.

CBH serves as the primary referral hospital for an extensive area, spanning from the Torres Strait in the north to Tully in the south. With over 700 beds, a dedicated medical team of over 700 doctors and 2500 nurses, all major health specialties and more than 30 sub-specialties are offered at CBH. Importantly, nearly one-third of CHHHS patients identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, making the service's commitment to inclusive and culturally-appropriate care a key and crucial feature of the healthcare service.

### **Comprehensive Inpatient Care**

Rehabilitation services are spread across two locations and provide a combined total of 20 inpatient beds. Central to the expert provision of care by the Cairns Rehabilitation Service is a compassionate and highly-experienced interdisciplinary team; comprising of a full team of doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, social workers, dietitians, podiatrists, prosthetists, clinical psychologists and neuropsychologists.

The Cairns Rehabilitation Service also presents a rich learning environment for medical students, students of various allied health disciplines and rehabilitation medicine trainees. The broad spectrum of rehabilitation medicine in both inpatient and outpatient settings is represented in patient presentations; including spinal cord injury, acquired brain injury, neurodegenerative disease, tropical disease, amputee care, complex orthopaedic conditions, cancer rehabilitation, general medicine and post-surgical care.

### **Support Beyond the Hospital**

Given the vast area served by CHHHS, the commitment to comprehensive care extends to outpatient clinics for complex neurological conditions, spasticity management, amputee rehabilitation and transitional care. A wide range of culturally-sensitive community rehabilitation services are available to help patients reintegrate into their communities and prior life roles.

With an ever-growing population in Far North Queensland, the demand for rehabilitation services has been increasing rapidly. The full scope of service provision is being reviewed with the ultimate goal of providing first-rate rehabilitation services in a culturally-appropriate manner

and location. With the way things have been going, possibly the only thing that shines as bright as the future of rehabilitation in Cairns is the sun!



About the author:

My name is Nathaniel and it's a privilege to join the RMSANZ communications team in preparing articles and pieces of interest in the wide world of rehabilitation medicine. I am a final year rehabilitation medicine registrar with a background in commerce and completing further studies in internal medicine. Alongside rehabilitation medicine, I am inspired by all things related to innovation in health, preventative medicine and the intersection of technology, health and enterprise. I encourage you to get involved with RMSANZ and would love to hear about what you want more of in our newsletters and publications. Watch this space for our Facebook page and don't forget to follow us on Twitter/X at <https://twitter.com/RMSANZ1/>, join the RMSANZ community at <https://rmsanz.net/> and maybe even join a special interest group!

