



Body, Mind & Spirit

Raven West is the program director for outpatient adult and pediatric rehabilitation services at Bay Area Rehabilitation Center (BARC), which includes programs such as work rehabilitation and aquatics. This article is to give the reader brief insight into the benefits of BARC's aquatics program detailing general as well as specific information to BARC.

Aquatic therapy provides many positive benefits for various conditions for those who find it difficult to exercise on land, have limited mobility and want to lose weight. Being in the water can alleviate muscle spasms, increase muscle strengthening, stability, walking, balance, and range of motion. The properties of water can decrease weight bearing forces, edema, and pain perception increasing mobility with lower levels of pain. (Lundy, Heather, 2012 www.PTCourses.com)

BARC's aquatic environment consists of an indoor, junior Olympic-sized heated pool and spa in which we provide 'skilled aquatic therapy' as well as aquatic exercise. The pool's depth ranges from 3'6" to 5', with ladders, stairs, a ramp and a hydraulic lift for appropriate accessibility. The temperature of the pool stays warm year round at 89 degrees with the spa's temperature of 104 degrees. For skilled aquatic therapy, a physician referral is required and the client must be evaluated by a physical or occupational therapist. For aquatics exercise classes, a physician approval form is required. These classes are conducted by an aquatics instructor and include low intensity, high intensity, open swim and classes for individuals with Parkinson's disease. There is an associated fee schedule for each class. The Parkinson's class is offered free of charge via Houston Area Parkinson's Society (HAPS).

A licensed therapist evaluates a client to determine whether the client would benefit from aquatic therapy. If it is deemed medically necessary and beneficial the therapist will develop a plan of care and an exercise routine specific for the client. The routine usually consists of 15 to 20 minutes of cardio followed by lower extremity or upper extremity stretching (pending diagnosis) followed by range of motion and strengthening exercises. The level of intensity is based on the client's physical ability and adjusted as such.

A medical history is taken by the therapist or a client will complete a medical history for aquatic therapy and aquatic classes, respectively, this is to make known precautions or contraindications to being in the heated water. Some precautions and contraindications consist of but not limited to blood pressure abnormalities, open wounds, tubes in nose, stomach or throat; athlete's foot, head lice, incontinence of bowel and bladder, infection of the skin or nose (MRSA), infectious respiratory disease (TB), heart problems, pregnancy, combative, and fear of water. (Lundy, Heather, 2012 www.PTCourses.com)

In the case of a client being interested in or having been recommended by their doctor to participate in the aquatic classes, they would need to bring in a completed aquatics packet (online or stop by the facility) with physician approval, complete orientation and enroll in the class that best suits them for their physical abilities as well as their medical condition/history.

The temperature of the pool and spa play a very important role in the types of clients that are able to participate in aquatic therapy/classes. An ideal aquatic therapy temperature can be a problematic concept based on the variety of activities and populations using a specific pool. Patients that are more likely to become chilled and want warmer temperatures are the elderly, patients with arthritis, and chronic pain or fibromyalgia patients. Unfortunately, at warmer temperatures, patients with cardiac issues, prenatal patients, obese patients, and patients with multiple sclerosis can be at an increased risk of overheating; one may have to decrease treatment duration or intensity of a session. (Lundy, Heather, 2012 www.PTCourses.com)

There are ways in which treatment sessions can be manipulated in the aquatic environment which consists of changing the depth of water, increasing the speed at which an activity is performed, utilizing foam noodles and weights and having the client to simply move through the water. Balance can be challenged with client instructed to stand on one foot, bringing both feet close together and closing their eyes. The water itself has a turbulent effect and the client has to work at maintaining upright posture. (Lundy, Heather,



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Overall, the properties of the water, temperature, buoyancy, hydrostatic pressure, and the resistance of the water in the aquatic setting can enhance functional range of motion and mobility by increasing muscle relaxation, enhance flexibility, increases strength and pain relief which all encourages more functional movement and independence. (Lundy, Heather, 2012 www.PTCourses.com)

This article gives a brief summation of benefits and consequences of the aquatic environment. For further detailed information please contact us at www.bayarearehab.org.

Dr. Raven West received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Tennessee State University, where she also completed the required courses for Physical Therapy. In May 2003, she graduated from Alabama State University, Montgomery, AL with a Clinical Doctorate in Physical Therapy. She is certified in CPR, First Aid, Functional Job Analysis, Pre-Work Screens, and is a credentialed clinical instructor. She has completed continuing education courses consisting of Balance Impairment and Fall Risks: Tests and Measures, Medicare and the Therapist, Generalized Therapeutic Kinesiology Taping and Manual Therapy, Pediatric courses, Fibromyalgia, SLE, Cancer and Therapy. ♦

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