

Should Your Club Be A Medical Fitness Facility?



By Lisa Dougherty

If you are interested in improving services to members, finding new clients for your personal trainers, massage therapists, pilates and yoga instructors and perhaps adding a few new members, you should consider becoming a Medical Fitness Facility. Medical Fitness Network (MFN) is a national referral service whose goal it is to connect an individual with a facility and the desired/needed services it offers.

Most CCD clubs qualify as "Fitness Facilities". In this case, "medical" refers to customers who have chronic medical conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, obesity, arthritis, osteoporosis, muscle loss and joint replacements, which all vary in their level of severity. These customers often look and appear normal, showing no obvious signs of their medical conditions. If you have middle aged or older members, then you very likely have people with "medical" conditions in your facility right now.

The 79 million baby boomers are the largest segment of our economy and they are expected to live longer than any previous generation. These 50 Plus individuals, control about 70% of the disposable income, spending over \$3.5 trillion. The number of aging people

seeking help from fitness professionals is about to reach a critical mass. Your facility should be prepared to take advantage of this situation. Among the many conditions needing extra attention are joint replacements, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, obesity, arthritis, Parkinson's, osteoporosis, diet and nutrition, and muscle loss. We once thought that these members were the exception, but numbers now tell us that they are trending toward the norm. They will be seeking educated, knowledgeable and sensitive fitness and health professionals to help make their lives more satisfying. Once that "health/medical" connection is made, these individuals will remain members forever because clubs are helping them maintain their "quality of life".

In early 2012, myself, a personal trainer with 17 years experience plus continuing education in many medical conditions and Dr. David Kruse of UC Irvine had a number of discussions about how this future need of our senior citizens was going to be met. Through my website, I was receiving many requests from across the country to help people with chronic medical conditions. I knew that many other trainers had taken the appropriate education, but obviously, the trainers and customers with medical needs were not connecting. Both Dr. Kruse and I agreed that a national referral network was needed. In late 2012, the Medical Fitness Network (MFN) was founded by a group of volunteers who all acknowledged the need and were committed to addressing the problem.

Developing a plan for regular exercise can be complicated for people with chronic medical conditions. Special training is usually needed. A qualified fitness professional can be an essential partner in developing a progressive fitness program. Individuals with chronic medical conditions need to find facilities in which there are professionals trained to address these needs. This concept enables a facility to differentiate its services to an audience who will likely be responsive to the invitation. Do you have trainers that are eager to learn these services and gain new skills? MFN maintains a calendar of available classes in a variety of areas offered by all kinds of national training services that can be available to your professionals. MFN is trying to connect trainers to the "medical" classes that they want and need to properly service this segment of the population.

Medical Fitness Network realized that to be successful, more than a simple list of professionals and their skills was needed. Most personal trainers do not have the skills or budget to develop a comprehensive business web site. It was decided that the MFN listing page would serve this purpose as well. The page would provide consumers with valuable information, allowing them to compare the education and work experience that each fitness professional had to offer.

A great web page is useless with no one to view it. Medical Fitness Network plans to drive traffic to their site by adding information that will show up in major search engines. MFN is partnering with



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national patient organizations, such as the Arthritis Foundation and the Sudden Cardiac Arrest Foundation. They already have web sites with significant consumer traffic which will be referred to MFN to search for professionals who understand the patient's needs.

To make the service even more effective, MFN volunteers are recruiting business partners who will provide discounts on continuing education and other products and services needed by fitness professionals to enhance their skills. MFN members can then recover their membership costs through the discounts offered by the network. Professionals who want to learn more about medical conditions can consult the MFN National Continuing Education Events Calendar to learn about listed courses and available discounts. It was the goal of MFN to create a network that would meet the needs of fitness professionals while still keeping it affordable so it would encourage trainers to seek additional continuing education.

The Medical Fitness Network concept has proved to be successful beyond imagination. Professionals in related industries heard about MFN and have asked to be included. MFN now serves not only fitness professionals, but also massage therapists, dieticians, physical therapists, chiropractors, acupuncturists, psychologists and health and wellness coaches, creating a truly multidisciplinary network.

MFN's volunteer advisory board and volunteer industry experts have grown to over 50 people. The network has been encouraged by the way businesses have flocked to support MFN. Over 100 business

partners now offer discounts to MFN members. A complete list can be found at www.medicalfitnessnetwork.org.

Recently, a number of fitness facilities approached MFN about including a Medical Fitness Facility membership. They felt the MFN network would reach a target audience for them in a way they could never achieve as an individual organization. In response to this request, Medical Fitness Network Facility membership was created and it costs \$200 per location per year and includes listings for two individual professionals. Additional MFN listings for professionals are available each at \$29/year. The MFN membership is now available with details at www.medicalfitnessnetwork.org. If you have additional questions, call 949-387-4505 and Lisa will be happy to offer additional information.

Lisa Dougherty founded Whole Body Fitness in 1999. She graduated from the University of CA, Irvine, Fitness Instructor Program, and is a Certified Personal Trainer and Health Coach through the American Council on Exercise. She has specialty certifications to work with those with medical conditions, post surgical/rehab as well as pre & postnatal fitness. Course work includes: Heart Disease, Breast Cancer Recovery, MS, Parkinson's, Diabetes, Alzheimer's/Dementia, Arthritis, Respiratory Disease, Fibromyalgia, Knee and hip replacement, and Pre and Postpartum fitness. Lisa founded the Medical Fitness Network in 2013. Lisa can be reached at lisa@medicalfitnessnetwork.org.



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