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RAISING THE BAR AND PATIENT OUTCOMES

Business in Focus first featured the Canadian healthcare and physiotherapy services provider Lifemark in September 2016. The 19-year-old business made waves for its leading-edge cancer rehabilitation and concussion therapy programs. A year later, the company continues to inspire the healthcare industry with its fresh approach to chronic pain management: focusing on empowerment of the individual so they can live an independent, high quality life.

Written by Samita Sarkar

“We are focused on practical, results-based treatments to get our patients back to living their lives. We are very proud of the work that our clinicians do every day with patients in their communities,” says Krista McIntyre, Registered Physiotherapist and National Director of Program Development.

Since we last featured Lifemark, the business has expanded and is now 143 locations strong. The all-Canadian company has expanded into Quebec as of June, 2017. It has partnered with several experts in the realms of concussion, vestibular function, and cancer rehabilitation to host courses and enhanced internal offerings so clinicians are kept abreast with the most up-to-date literature, in order to make evidence-based decisions and recommendations for their patients.

Further, Lifemark has updated its company purpose statement as it continues to build on its specialty programs and focus on health needs affecting Canadians today. The new statement is ‘movement to a better life.’ “It reflects our aspirations for our patients as well as our employees to be well. Not only to bring them to a better place physically, but also in realizing their life’s potential,” McIntyre explains.

One thing that hasn’t changed is Lifemark’s patient satisfaction rate, which continues to be in the 95th to 97th percentile.

A customizable, interdisciplinary approach to treating patients’ health issues is ubiquitous in all of Lifemark’s programs, as the company recognizes that many symptoms do not exist in a vacuum; many physiotherapy patients who suffer from chronic pain, for example, may also require mental health or addictions support. Physiotherapy patients receive a treatment plan that emphasizes education and empowerment, ending the “cycle of rehabilitation.”

“We feel that there are a lot of overlapping risk factors to developing addiction issues and chronic pain, including a variety of mental health factors, such as anxiety, depression and stress; a lack of social support; and a history of abuse or trauma. Although treating addiction specifically is out of scope for physiotherapists, we can play a role once patients are medically ►

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► cleared to participate further in recovery, and that’s what we do in our clinic every day,” elaborates Amy MacDonald, Registered Physiotherapist and Clinic Director of Lifemark Meadowlark Centre in Edmonton, Alberta.

In response to the national discussion around the prevalence of mental health conditions in Canadian society, Lifemark has a newly established research-based mental health service program, called the Lifemark Integrated Functional Transition Program, or the LIFT Program. The goal of this program is to teach individuals concrete, practical coping skills and strategies to help them deal with their condition. It also allows patients to practice these tools in a safe environment, and gives them a sense of independence as they get back to their daily activities.

“Mental health function is assessed and treated by our skilled clinicians—these include occupational therapists, kinesiologists, physiotherapists, psychologists, or clinical counsellors—and the client’s treatment services are customized to their needs based on their diagnosis, barriers, and the complexity of their mental health problems,” McIntyre tells us.

Lifemark’s teams of clinicians have the advanced skills to work closely with mental health clients and help them restore their

functioning through a variety of approaches, such as structured reactivation, energy management, pacing and planning, sleep hygiene, goal attainment, symptom management, and cognitive behavioural therapy, as well as traditional psychological intervention.

Moreover, Lifemark shares in the growing concern for society’s changing attitudes around opioid use and the opioid addiction crisis. The Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) has published that over the last two decades, Canadians have been led to believe that opioids are a safe, effective and non-addictive method of pain management, but the use of prescription opioids has grown in Canada to the extent where we are now the second largest per-capita user in the world. “We believe, along with the CPA, that the lack of access to physiotherapy and interdisciplinary pain care is a contributor to this,” says McIntyre.

McIntyre notes that in a time when thousands of Canadians have persistent pain affecting their ability to live a full and healthy life, there is scientific literature that supports the use of physiotherapy, exercise, and interdisciplinary care. Lifemark’s clinic at the Meadowlark Health Centre in Edmonton, Alberta, focuses on an interdisciplinary approach to pain management that will reduce the impact or reliance on opioids. ►►

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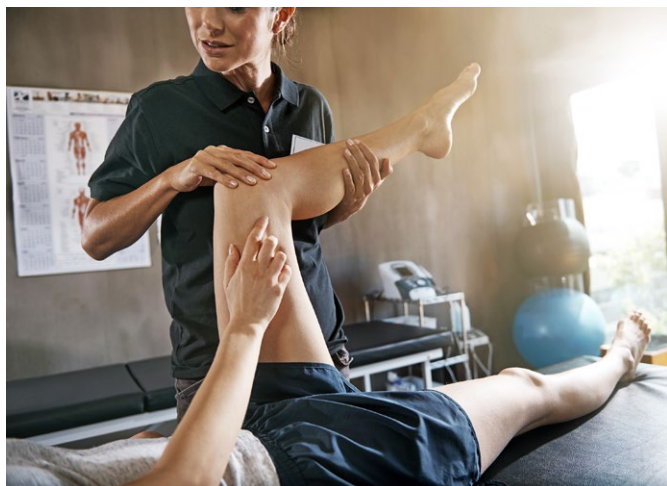
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► “We have patients who have unfortunately not been provided with alternative strategies to manage pain,” says MacDonald. “This may have led them to a cycle of abuse of their prescription or chosen medications. Once our physicians have stabilized the addiction issue, our physiotherapists, psychologists, and the rest of our team work to replace the reliance on pharmaceuticals with non-pharmacologic methods.”

That being said, some patients at Lifemark may in fact continue to use medication in combination with therapy. However, the prescriptions are managed by a team of physicians who

understand the importance of underutilized interventions that Lifemark offers as an alternative.

Because there is inherent overlap between each of the disciplines, each clinician working with the patient—whether they are occupational therapists, psychologists, or physiotherapists—communicates with the others to work toward established goals. “Our entire team meets for rounds two to three times each week to make sure that our patients who have been newly assessed for our program are reviewed and their goals are understood by everyone, and also that active patients are monitored to ensure they are progressing. Individualized treatment plans utilize different disciplines in varying degrees based upon patients’ needs and goals,” describes MacDonald.

Murray Kowalczyk, Chronic Pain Program Lead Physiotherapist at Lifemark’s Meadowlark location, tells us that there are two main components of Lifemark’s physiotherapy treatment: self-management and the restoration of function.

Kowalczyk has seen firsthand that many clients with chronic pain put others before themselves and often neglect self-care. To empower patients to take control of their symptoms (as opposed to having their symptoms control them), the self-management component consists of a variety of techniques, including home exercise programs, relaxation techniques such as meditation or self-massage, pacing when completing tasks, and of course education.

“There is a big focus on active treatment. The patient is actively engaged; they are the one taking control of their condition instead of relying on a clinician to do so,” Kowalczyk says.

The second aspect to Lifemark’s physiotherapy treatment, the restoration of function, also involves mental as well as physical development. It includes reducing a patient’s fear of movement and activity, and challenging long-held beliefs. Because Lifemark focuses on improving quality of life rather than merely improving pain, patients will be asked to consider what function means to them – whether it’s the ability to play with their grandchildren in the park, or simply reach the top shelf in the kitchen again.

Here, education is critical to establish that while pain may be present, it does not equate to damage. Despite the pain, they can increase their functional abilities and start to return to activities they have been avoiding for a long time. Also, physiotherapy patients must keep in mind that decreasing pain doesn’t necessarily mean that they will be increasing overall function, which is why opioid use should be limited when possible.

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Lifemark is leading the way to making a difference in healthcare. One patient at a time. We are a proud partner of Lifemark.”

Rick Lau

Founder of CSC
clinicsuppliescanada.com



"Patients may have long-held beliefs that pain is bad and should always be avoided at all costs. This belief can be difficult to mold, but can be changed through education as they are exposed to new movements and activities, learning that despite their pain they can do more than they think they can. It lights them up, and it's so exciting to see," Kowalczyk adds.

Kowalczyk encourages patients who are experiencing chronic and persistent pain to establish a routine. This helps patients to avoid many situations that could further impede their recovery, including falling into isolation, developing irregular wake/sleep cycles, and activity avoidance leading to deconditioning. A routine, whether it's getting out of the house or establishing some consistent tasks they must do, gives patients a sense of direction and control over their situation.

For patients who are not working, establishing a routine also helps them receive some of the documented benefits of work, such as a sense of accomplishment, social interaction, and renewed confidence. Practically speaking, routines help patients regain their function because whether it has been a "good" or "bad" day, they still have a set of goals to accomplish.

Going forward, the clinically-focused healthcare services provider will continue striving to solve the complex needs of the patients in the Canadian healthcare system. As national interest in interdisciplinary care grows, Lifemark is poised for continued growth and further geographic expansion. For instance, this year Lifemark was invited to speak at the International Concussion Summit in Niagara Falls for the fourth year in a row about its unique healthcare approach.

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"We're focused on continuing to develop new services to best meet the changing needs of our patients. In order to do this, we focus on educational and professional development for our staff, participate in a number of pilot projects into new areas, and share relevant clinical studies and strategies to make certain our service is at the highest level. Ensuring we move our patients to a better life is our number one priority," McIntyre concludes. ■

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