

Getting Personalized Results from Group Training

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Don't you just love it when you offer a Special Populations class and that is exactly what you get? Three students with low back pain, two with hypertension, one with a total hip replacement and another (who comes on occasion) who is diabetic and has arthritic joints. What do you do?

This article will examine how to build bridges between therapy and aquatic exercise by offering an option that can accommodate various orthopedic and medical needs in one class. Aquatic fitness experts from across the country will share their secrets to providing the community with a needed service, while creating a new revenue source for the facility. First, it is important to understand that participants often share similar training goals to improve muscular and cardiorespiratory endurance, range of motion, balance and functional performance. Then personalized options can be provided within the program to accommodate the individual orthopedic and medical needs.

Professionals nation-wide agree that Special Population & Post-Rehab group programs should be limited to 6-12 people, depending on their reconditioning phase and what type of class format will be most feasible. Small group training may be the key to enabling Aquatic Fitness Professionals to address individual needs at an affordable price. The ability to service several individuals with various needs in one group may seem quite intimidating, so we asked a few experts to help by sharing their successful strategies.

Acton, Denomme, and Powers recommend in the Aquatic After Care Training Manual (2005) that to manage this type of class an Aquatic Professional must possess a wide spectrum of traits to responsibly facilitate Special Population or Post-Rehab programming. The qualities and skills the authors suggest include:

- Knowledge of the aquatic environment, components of fitness and appropriate movement execution to design safe and effective training
- Basic understanding of orthopedic conditions and special populations
- Ability to listen and not assume participant goals
- Basic water safety and first aid skills
- Leadership abilities and the confidence to successfully manage a diverse group
- Business skills to establish and market the program

Introducing a New Client

Monique Acton, Medical Exercise Specialist and AEA Trainer, successfully coaches her special population and post-rehab clients one-on-one and in small group settings. One group in particular, taught at a Home Association Pool in Venice, Florida has been with Monique for three years. What began as a single personal training client has grown to a four-person group training program. She explains the important safety steps she has taken to build her group:

Step 1 – The new client must complete a health history questionnaire and written medical clearance to join. Acton highly recommends that the new client's first visit be spent watching the rest of the group to familiarize them with the program. This allows an opportunity for the instructor to meet the individual and for the client to meet the rest of the group. Depending on the medical condition of the client, it may be necessary for Acton to consult with the doctor even before the client starts the program.

Step 2 - Once medical clearance has been granted and the instructor has a clear understanding of the precautions for the client, it is time for the client to participate in the second class. Acton recommends that the instructor go into the water with the new client to safely familiarize the participant to the pool and introduce basic recovery skills (AEA 2005, pg. 279). The instructor would then be able to coach the client

for correct body alignment, how to move in the water and identify the best equipment, if any, for the individual to use.

Additional considerations must be made as you establish any type of special population class. Items one must consider include: instructor-client ratio, medical requirements to participate, duration of the workout and how to integrate the participants you are working with. Some of these items will be determined by your experience and education as well as the type and temperature of the pool you are working in.

The chart below summarizes what four Aquatic Fitness Professionals from across the U.S. suggested in our interviews to address these specific issues.

Aquatic Professionals interviewed:

- Monique Acton, MES, AEA, AFAA, ACE & AAHFRP Certified
- Gail Blossom, PTA, LMT, ACE, AEA & ATRIC Certified
- Shaun Dumas, MES, Acupuncture Physician, Doctor of Oriental Medicine, www.acupuncturehealingcenter.com
- Tera Galloway, Master Burdenko Instructor, www.rehabfocus.com

	Home Association	Recreation Center	Outpatient Hospital Center	Recreation Center
Aquatic Professional	Monique Acton	Gail Blossom	Shaun Dumas	Tera Galloway
Water Temperature Used	83° - 88° F	86° F	88° - 92° F	83° - 86° F
Instructor : Client Ratio	1:4	1:2 up to 1:4	1:6 up to 1:12	1:8 up to 1:12
Forms and Skills Required to participate	Written Medical Clearance by physician	Must be able to ambulate on own, with assistive device, or with the aid of a personal assistant Written Medical Clearance by physician	Post surgery stitches must be removed Written Medical Clearance by physician	Basic swimming & recovery skills Written Medical Clearance by physician
Length of workout	60 minutes	30 - 60 minutes *most 45 – 60 minutes	45 minutes *Phase III transitional or post-rehab	30 - 45 minutes *Higher intensity & Shorter duration
Is the group integrated or do individuals work on their own	A combination: Some use continuous training others a circuit option Everyone comes together for stretch and relaxation phase Details below for Circuit-Continuous Training format	Both, depending on needs of clients If group has similar needs then more group activities can be implemented Details below for Circuit Group Training format	Details below for Individualized Group Training format	

Personalizing the Program

Each professional's approach is slightly different depending on what type of pool setting they are working in and the needs of the participants. Personalized programming is achieved by always managing the group even when introducing someone new or providing individual feedback. Participants are taught to be self-sufficient when performing their exercises proving to be critical for long-term and lasting success. The various format options used by the Aquatic Fitness Professionals are described next.

Detailed Class Formats

Key: Lower Extremity = LE
Upper Extremity = UE

Monique's Circuit - Continuous Training Format: (4 Participants)

Each client performs a personalized endurance routine for the first 35 minutes. After the **cardiorespiratory endurance** segment everyone moves to shallow water for 15 minutes of **muscle conditioning and balance training** and 10 minutes of **flexibility training**. During the muscle-conditioning phase each client uses different equipment such as mini-cuffs, drag equipment, or no equipment. Exercises are performed to target all major muscles of the LE.

The personalized cardio endurance phase of each client is described next.

Client A

Medical History: Overall arthritis, everything hurts to move on land, experiences difficulty with balance after several falls and a fused spine.

Format: 35 minutes of continuous deep water training

Endurance Phase: 35 minutes is designated for deep-water training, exercising all the major muscles without impact to the joints. 10 minutes is designated for shallow water walking to work on balance and stability.

Client B

Medical History: Poor balance, very poor muscular strength and endurance, very low energy.

Format: 35 minutes of shallow water circuit training

Endurance Phase: Water walking patterns using no equipment are combined with resistance training for the UE using paddles.

Client C

Medical History: Knee replacement 15 years ago, slightly overweight.

Format: 35 minutes of deep water circuit training using a buoyancy belt, mini-cuffs around the ankles, and hand buoys for the UE

Endurance Phase: The trainer demonstrates a couple of deep water movements. The pattern is repeated twice with no equipment in the hands. Next, client C jogs over and picks up the hand buoys to perform the UE exercise that is demonstrated by the trainer on deck. Once a set is complete, the client goes back to the deep and the process repeats over again.

Client D

Medical History: Poor low back and LE muscle strength.

Format: 35 minute shallow to deep circuit using a buoyancy belt and elastic tubing

Endurance Phase: After making one round in the deep, Client D comes back to the shallow and the trainer gives instructions for water walking. After completing the water walking pattern, one UE exercise is performed at the pool wall using elastic tubing. Once one set is complete, the client goes back to the deep and repeats the process.

Gail's Group Training Circuit Program: (2-4 Participants)

Water walking warm up: inspired by *Ruth Sova's Backhab Program*

Light stretching

Water walking with emphasis on balance

Muscle conditioning circuit: Individuals rotate every 5 minutes through strength stations designed to target UE and LE strengthening with and without equipment. The Aquatic Professional provides feedback on participant alignment, posture and movement execution.

Progression: Clients move into the deep water as the program advances and their comfort level increases.

General stretching

Shaun's Individual Back Stabilization & Strength Protocol: (6-12 Participants)

In the outpatient aquatic center each client is provided with a copy of their personalized program on a laminated card. The Aquatic Fitness Professional oversees that exercises are being performed correctly. Each person is responsible for following their prescribed workout similar to the following sample:

Water walking warm up: 3-5 minutes total

Cardiorespiratory: 5 minutes increasing to 20 minutes, complete a combination of: power walking, marching, and sidestepping. Add movements on the noodle such as bicycling, straight leg kicks, and scissor kicks.

Muscle Core Conditioning UE and Trunk: Back stabilization while seated on noodle as if on swing 5 reps increasing to 25, doing pelvic tilts, alternating arm raises in neutral, and alternating leg raises in neutral

Muscle Strengthening LE: Perform each exercise for 30 seconds: mini squats, hamstring curls, front leg raise, side leg raise, and small leg circles.

Muscle Strengthening UE: In a seated position with back against the wall perform each strength training exercise for 30 seconds such as: arm crosses, bicep curl and breast stroke

Flexibility: Target each of the major muscle groups and hold each stretch for 30 seconds, do not hold breath

Marketing the Program

Once the factors are established to build a small group training program that will provide positive training results for the clientele then it is time to make people aware it is available. Blossom's facility has a "Playbook" that is delivered to all city residents. The seasonally changing brochure draws new people in to their land and water programs. Blossom and Galloway both rely heavily on, results-oriented, quality service and a community friendly atmosphere to increase referrals from their best advertisement - "word of mouth". Dumas suggests Aquatic Professionals further build their program by building bridges with local medical professionals. Call rehab centers and ask if you can bring them lunch and tell them about the program you offer. At the in-service, provide them with various examples to help them to feel like they can trust you, your skills, and your experience so that they want to refer their patients to you.

Now it's your turn to take this information and get personalized! The next time you feel challenged by your special populations remember the various format options available. Rise to the needs of your community by implementing results-oriented programs at an affordable cost with the personal touch!