

Education gets clinical exercise physiology moving

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Photo: Wintec's Biokinetic Clinic

A new specialised exercise rehabilitation clinic is working to strengthen New Zealand's emerging clinical [exercise physiology profession](#).

More than 30 [Waikato Institute of Technology \(Wintec\)](#) Bachelor and Postgraduate Diploma of Sport and Exercise Science students are developing and delivering personalised exercise programs for older people as part of their qualifications.

Under the supervision of trained staff, students are assisting the 35 Hamilton participants at Wintec's Biokinetic Clinic, one of just a handful in the nation, which focuses on the prevention, management and rehabilitation of chronic health conditions, such as diabetes and obesity, and chronic pain or injury.

Wintec is one of an increasing number of education providers, including the [University of Auckland](#), [CPIT](#) and the [Universal College of Learning \(UCOL\)](#), offering programs enabling students to train as clinical [exercise physiologists](#).

The move comes after [Clinical Exercise Physiology New Zealand \(CEPNZ\)](#) was formed in 2012 to develop the fledgling allied health discipline.

[Health Workforce New Zealand](#) has also highlighted clinical exercise physiology as one of its new workforce roles, following in the footsteps of countries where clinical exercise physiology is well established, such as Australia, the United Kingdom, South Africa and the United States.

Clinical exercise physiologists provide tailored and monitored exercise programs and lifestyle education to prevent and manage patients' injuries, chronic conditions and diseases.

Wintec program coordinator Stephen Burden, a CEPNZ board member, said clinical exercise physiology taps into specialist knowledge in diseases and pathologies, and how exercise can be leveraged to improve patients' health.

Mr Burden said the nation faces an ageing population alongside an obesity epidemic, rising diabetes rates and other chronic conditions, such as cardiovascular and respiratory disease.

“The impact that specialised exercise programs can have on the prevention, management and rehabilitation of these conditions is huge but until recently, it hasn't been recognised as an allied health profession in New Zealand, and therefore we haven't had the training options available,” he said.

The program at the clinic, which opened in July, has been labelled a win-win initiative for both the students and participants.

“We're helping to improve the quality of people's lives, and they're helping our students put their skills into practice through real life scenarios,” Mr Burden said.

“The experience is invaluable for our students - you can't get this sort of learning out of a text book.”

Mr Burden aims to grow the clinic, embedding staff and students in health care organisations to deliver clinical exercise physiology programs on-site.

“We're in talks with a number of health organisations and it's likely that we'll develop these associations in 2016.”