

Profile questionnaire

Full name: Donna Francis

Year graduated from Deakin: 2007

Course name: Bachelor of Applied Science (Exercise & Sport Science) (now Bachelor of Exercise and Sport Science – H343)

Campus: Burwood

Other qualifications: Masters in Applied Science (Exercise Rehabilitation), Victoria University; Pilates; SmartCycle Instructor; currently completing Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

What is your current job and what does it entail?

I currently work for Southern Health at both the Dandenong and Casey Hospitals as an Exercise Physiologist. I am the Exercise Rehabilitation Coordinator for the Chronic Heart Failure Rehabilitation Program (CHFRP). This is a program offered to patients within our Chronic Heart Failure Program. This program is part of Southern Health's Hospital Admission Risk Program (HARP). The aim of HARP and is to enhance patients' self-management of their condition and decrease hospital admissions and emergency department presentations.

As part of my role, I assess patients referred to our rehabilitation program (both pre and post program participation); prescribe appropriate home exercise programs and/or group exercise programs; conduct home visits as required; monitor patients throughout the intervention; refer to appropriate community programs post CHFRP and follow-up as required. Our goal is not only to enable and enhance patient physical activity/exercise participation but to also educate them on their condition/disease and provide assistance to help them self-manage their symptoms and condition.

I am also currently a sessional Lecturer for Australian Catholic University, lecturing in Cardio-respiratory rehabilitation in their postgraduate program.

What are the things you enjoy most about your job and what have been your career highlights to date?

I would certainly have to say that I love making a difference to people's lives. I have numerous stories of how my input has assisted patients get back on their feet and back to doing things that are meaningful to them. Being able to help enhance someone's quality of life is a huge highlight for me, no matter how big or small it may seem to be.

While working within musculoskeletal rehabilitation, I worked with many TAC and WorkCover patients. I remember one young patient being involved in a motorbike accident. They had quite extensive lower limb injuries and required the assistance of walking aids for almost 12 months. I remember the day they enthusiastically walked unaided into therapy and told me they were going back to TAFE to study and get a new job. They were so grateful for our help, encouragement and persistence, which makes my job so worthwhile.

Another patient, with chronic heart failure, diabetes and renal failure to name a few, was barely well enough to walk to her letterbox to collect her mail. Her goal was to be well enough to walk her daughter 'down the aisle' one day. Once participating in my rehabilitation program and completing her home exercise program she was able to complete a 40 min grocery shop on her own without assistance. Previously she required family members to do this for her. She was so grateful for my assistance and so happy with the improvement she had made that she got a membership at a local gym to continue with her progress.

What do you intend to do in the future?

As much as I love my clinical work I also have a keen interest in research and education. My future ambitions are to pursue a position in education (lecturing etc.) while also maintaining a firm role within the community and clinical work. My passion is not only to work within the clinical setting (i.e. through rehabilitation and helping improve individuals' health status and quality of life) but also to help train and teach other health professionals so that they too can play a vital role in patient/client rehabilitation and health outcomes.

How do you feel your Deakin course has helped your career – both in obtaining your current position, and in the future development of your career?

I did not start university until I was 23 and even at that point in time I was still not too sure where I was headed in terms of my career. I was fortunate enough to meet some very inspiring individuals during my time at Deakin. They were always more than willing to spend extra time with me when needed and they certainly helped guide and shape my current goals.

I also found the diversity of units fantastic as this helped guide me into my area of interest. I completed many units on nutrition, public health, sports and human/exercise physiology. There were some units I loved and some I didn't like so much, but this helped guide me toward the area I was most passionate about.

I would also have to say that the placement opportunity was the defining point of my university experience. Following much discussion with numerous lecturers, guest presenters and health professionals, I successfully completed a placement with an Exercise Physiologist and from this point on I knew that this was the career for me.

I believe that the support and encouragement Deakin staff provided me during my studies certainly helped shape my career. They have also inspired me to hopefully one day walk in their shoes and repay the favour to other young, upcoming health professionals.