INside the OUTcomes: A Rehabilitation Research Podcast

Episode 19: A Free, Online Mindfulness, Exercise and Nutrition Program for People with Mobility Issues

SHARON PARMET, HOST:

Welcome to INside the OUTcomes: A Rehabilitation Research Podcast from the Center for Rehabilitation Outcomes Research at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab. I'm your host Sharon Parmet.

On this episode we'll be talking about an exercise and wellness program called MENTOR, which stands for Mindfulness, Exercise and Nutrition to Optimize Resilience. It's an online program for people with mobility limitations and is designed and offered by the National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability, also known by the acronym NCHPAD. The Center for Rehabilitation Outcomes Research at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab has recently partnered with NCHPAD to recruit participants for the MENTOR program. Today, I am joined by Dr. Jim Rimmer, Professor in the School of Health Professions and the first Lake Shore Foundation Endowed Chair in Health Promotion and Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He currently serves as director of the UAB School of Health Professions research collaborative and is director of NCHPAD. I'm also joined by Dr. Tim Behrens, a Professor in the School of Rehabilitation Sciences and Technology at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, and a previous MENTOR participant.

Welcome to the podcast Dr. Rimmer. And Dr. Behrens.

DR. RIMMER:  
Thank you.

DR. BEHRENS:  
Thanks.

SHARON:

The first question is for Dr. Rimmer. I'm hoping that you can kind of describe MENTOR in a little bit more detail. What are its objectives? How did it start up? Just a little bit of history.

DR. RIMMER:

The focus of MENTOR is really to address the issues associated with physical health, mental health and spiritual slash emotional health. And I feel that in order to really capture what people with disabilities and really the rest of society need, we've got to look at the 24-hour day. And that's what MENTOR does, what do you do for 1,440 minutes that either increase your health or decrease your health. And that's really where we begin with MENTOR, teaching our participants how to do that over the course of an eight-week program.

SHARON:

So with MENTOR it's an it's an online program that people participate in for eight weeks, is that correct?

DR. RIMMER:

It is, it’s eight week. So it's five hours a week, an hour a day, two hours of exercise, one hour mindfulness and one hour nutrition. We're looking currently at maybe restructuring some of that to make it less intensive for people who are more interested in doing things on their own more of a self-management program.

Today, it's pretty intensive in terms of the number of hours per week. But at the end of it, what we've been hearing from participants, is that they've learned a lot about holistic health versus one dimension. And you know, very often what we used to do is provide them with one aspect, typically exercise you know, everything is out there. For people with disabilities. It's all about exercise. And we realize that there are many dimensions of emotional, spiritual health, and really mindfulness and things that can improve their mental health that we've been missing in the community of people. So that's why we began MENTOR.

SHARON:

So as I understand it, it's online and it's exercise, you get a box of exercise equipment sent for free right to your door. And you you're linked with a nutritionist and mindfulness coach.

DR. RIMMER:

Yes, yeah, you get a nice, large box, and I'm sure you'll hear this from Tim. There's quite a bit of equipment in there that you get to keep, we also have a diary. And we send that out prior to the program's initiation. And then we really look at how that equipment is used. We have a full-time exercise trainer, John, who actually teaches people different techniques to improve various aspects of exercise health.

SHARON:

Dr. Behrens or Tim, if I may call you that, can you tell me a little bit about yourself and where it just a little bit about where you live and how you got introduced to the MENTOR program?

DR. BEHRENS:

Sure. So as you mentioned earlier, I am a professor at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. And in 2020, I was sick with COVID and subsequently had a lot of strokes from that, and disability related to that. So one of my colleagues actually knew of my story and I saw her at a conference and she was telling me about NCHPAD, and I had never heard of it before. So I thought Oh, I’ll check this out a little bit. So I talked to Jim [Rimmer] and we had a conversation about that. And he asked me to get involved in the MENTOR program. And that's how I got started. And I live now via ADA accommodation in New Mexico, because part of my sickness is that I'm not able to handle cold weather. And as you might imagine, Wisconsin is not great for people who can't do cold weather. So I work remotely from New Mexico.

SHARON:

Can you describe, like, take us through what it was like to be part of the MENTOR program? What was your… what was your average week like when you were with the program?

DR. BEHRENS:

My experience was probably a bit atypical, because I knew a bit about fitness already in nutrition. So there were some things that were quite easy for me to do. But I know from speaking with friends that have done it, it's pretty new stuff for them. So probably a little more intensive, but still not bad. Probably, as Jim was mentioning, probably five hours a week at most, I think it's pretty flexible. And you can kind of make your way through that. For me, it was probably more like two to three hours.

SHARON:

What's the exercise portion like? You log in, and you're with a trainer online, going through the exercises one on one or with a group?

DR. BEHRENS:

So it is a group setting. So there were, I believe, four people in my group, and we would meet via Zoom and with our box of toys that were sent to us. And so John would say, okay, take out your bands, for example, we would do

exercises with the bands, or we would do things seated, or we would do things, you know, that he prescribed for us based on our own abilities.

SHARON:

Then for the mindfulness part, what was that what was included in that part?

DR. BEHRENS:

For me, that was probably the most meaningful part because it was a little bit new to me. And the basis of my injury was really executive function. And so there are things that I needed to work on, that it provided the opportunity to work on. So just doing some relaxation techniques that were very meaningful to me. And doing that over and over with different folks, different trainers. And then the rest of the people in my cohort, there were probably about, I guess, four or five people in that cohort. And so you get to know them, and you build that sense of community with them.

SHARON:

Have you kept in touch with anyone from your cohort?

DR. BEHRENS:

We do have a chat function through the Healthy app, which I'm sure Jim will talk about later. But healthy app allows you to chat with people on your cohorts. And so I have kept in touch with them through the Healthy app.

SHARON:

Okay. And then I just wanted to know a little bit more about the nutrition part, how does that come into play?

DR. BEHRENS:

So the dietitians that work for the program, they, they have, they have meals that they prepare, and you basically watch them, and they also talk about leading you through certain meal plans that they've done for each week. So you can do those or not do those, it's really up to you. And then at the end of the program, one of the homework assignments is that you prepare your own meal, but you just provide the directions about how to do that. And then the day they put all those together in a book that gets shared out with the entire group.

SHARON:

Did you have some good recipes in there?

DR. BEHRENS:

I did, actually. I've tried a couple of them. And then I also came in contact with another group that she had a different group. And she shared her recipe book with me as well. She was actually a chef beforehand. So it's been great to see other recipes as well.

SHARON:

So it sounds like there's quite a bit of community building through the MENTOR program in addition to the exercise and mindfulness and nutrition.

DR. BEHRENS:

Yeah, like I was saying previously, to my mind, community was the best thing I got from them. Because you were able to connect with like-minded people who are dealing with similar things. Not everybody was stroke like me, some people were different, like they had spinal injuries or they had other things going on. And so you get to see things from a full spectrum. And that really has a sense of community that you're part of this community now and you have similar things you're doing.

SHARON:

What have you kept up with some of the exercises and techniques that you learned through MENTOR after the program ended?

DR. BEHRENS:

I would say that, like the box that you get the bands, I still use those regularly. And I still do like some abdominal workouts that John would show us or warm ups, things like that. I still do those things regularly. I tried to do two days a week of must muscle building and a little bit of stretching to help my flexibility in my my progression in my rehab.

SHARON:

Oh, it sounds like it was extremely useful to you. And I'll ask this, but I'm sure the answer is yes. Would you recommend it to other people who have mobility issues?

DR. BEHRENS:

Without a doubt, I think for me, and actually, we just had a meeting recently with some other people that had done MENTOR and the thing that we all talked about is it was the turning point for all of us. And it was that point when you were really able to say, Okay, this is happening to me, and now I'm going to move forward in a positive way. And so really, NCHPAD serves as the turning point for many people, and I feel honored to just be a part of it.

SHARON:

If you're interested in joining MENTOR, you can go to NCHPAD Connect dot org slash mentor. <https://www.nchpadconnect.org/mentor/>

To join MENTOR, you can click here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1--ponkunbhau-JBZxrbWGqb00s1EjfnMeTZcXUsWv6w/edit?usp=sharing>

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