

Proving There Is Life After Stroke



BY JESSICA ROUSE

Heidi Janssen has spent more than 20 years in the medical field working with people living with stroke. For the last 15 years, she has been working in the research field to better understand how stroke patients can best recover.

Heidi grew up in Singleton and has spent her entire career in the region. Employed as a Physiotherapist and Health Service Manager at Hunter New England Health, Dr Heidi leads a stroke research program at the Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI).

Heidi has spent the past 15 years working to co-design, implement and evaluate evidence-based stroke care in regional Hunter New England, which is how ESTEEM was born.

The ESTEEM program is a group-based program designed to help stroke survivors recover after stroke. ESTEEM is based on research evidence that recovery and quality of life after a stroke, or a brain injury can be improved by participating in a combination of exercise, socialising and creativity using a combination of physical, cognitive and social activity that can support the brain to rewire after stroke.

“Engaging in regular exercise, staying socially connected to family and friends and challenging the brain with new and creative activities are all known to be important

to remain cognitively healthy.

“The ESTEEM Program is tapping into similar principals but in this instance, for the benefit of helping someone’s brain be more receptive to the rehabilitation therapy needed to regain independence after a stroke,” Dr Heidi explained.

ESTEEM has been running at West Wallsend and Kurri Kurri for a couple of years now with sessions twice a week for 10 weeks. The program has been supported by a generous HMRI donor in a Women in Medical Research Fellowship and was designed through consultation with health professionals, people with lived experience as well as experienced dancers and artists.

“ESTEEM is being evaluated in a research study which people who have had a stroke can consent to participate in and attend in a community setting. Importantly people who participate are with other people who have had a stroke so they can share their experiences.”

Heidi and her research team are embarking on a Medical Research Future Fund sponsored trial of the ESTEEM program to evaluate both people’s experience of, and the effectiveness derived from, participating in the program.

An important aim of the ESTEEM After Stroke Project is to ensure that if found to assist stroke recovery, this program can remain available in regional communities well after the research funding has ceased.

“Our vision is that people living with stroke

in regional communities now and well into the future, will be able to continue to access the ESTEEM Program ongoing after the research ends.”

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TO GET INVOLVED:

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