



Money

Therapeutic golf program stroke of genius

ENTERPRISE: Physiotherapist Sari Shatil realizes her dream by opening her own clinic

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Sari Shatil, owner of Neuphysio Rehabilitation, has developed a therapeutic golf rehabilitation program that not only helps injured golfers get back in their game, but uses the sport as a means of recovery to help people return to their regular lives. (CRAIG GLOVER The London Free Press)

From her years working at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, physiotherapist Sari Shatil has one very clear memory.

"When I would start working with someone recovering from brain surgery, after a trauma of some kind, one of the first things they often said to me was, 'You've got to get me back to playing golf.' That's when it occurred to me that golf could be used as a tool in rehabilitation."

Shatil filed that notion away for several years, and when she moved back to London in 1997, she started working on the idea.

Working on the idea meant enrolling at the University of Western Ontario and earning her master's degree, working closely with Jayne Garland, a professor of physical therapy.

"I worked for three years with people who had strokes, with half their bodies paralyzed. We studied the way golf could be used as a tool in rehabilitation. We published studies. It was an evidence-based approach," Shatil, 39 says.

In November, she realized a dream and opened her own physiotherapy clinic, Neuphysio Rehabilitation. A major component of the clinic is her therapeutic golf rehabilitation program, based on her studies at UWO and years of experience working at other clinics.

"I turn 40 this year," says the energetic Shatil. "I wanted to open this clinic before then. I had been thinking about doing it for a long time."

The clinic is built on four primary practices. Shatil and another physiotherapist, Elizabeth Fox, work with anyone who has injuries to the brain, spinal cord, neck and back. They could be the result of accidents and traumas or from conditions such as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's or sciatica.

Another component of the practice is vestibular rehab, a growing area of physiotherapy that treats and reduces vertigo, dizziness and disorientation.

Third, the clinic provides general orthopedics to a variety of patients.

The golf component accounts for only about 20% of the overall practice, although at this time of year, that number goes way up.

"I love my job, but I'm most passionate about the golf rehab," Shatil says.

The golf program is designed for individuals with brain injuries of some kind. They might have been golfers previously, anxious to get back to a sport they love. Just as likely, though, they participated in another sport, something they may not be able to handle again right away, or ever.

"We have a mixture of longtime golfers and those who are new to the game," Shatil says. "Some are playing in wheelchairs; it's quite a mixture."

The top-drawer golf program includes 12 sessions over six weeks. Half the sessions are at the clinic, doing various rehab exercises specifically geared to help the golf swing. The other six sessions take place at East Park Golf Gardens. There are six people or fewer in the sessions, and there is one staff person for every two participants.

Shatil works with CPGA pro Brian Gallant.

"He has a real interest in disabled golf. He makes recommendations on how to improve each person's swing, and I translate that into a physio program to allow them to make that particular move Brian is recommending."

The cost of the six-week package is \$700, not covered by OHIP but often covered by private plans. There are cheaper packages that include less instruction as well.

Less than a year into running her own clinic, Shatil is thrilled with the results. "I'm working harder than I have since I was in undergrad at McGill, but I'm loving it."

She shares space with the Downtown Clinic, London's first private physiotherapy clinic, run by Gloria Gilbert, a mentor of Shatil's whom she now proudly counts as a colleague.

She hopes to hire a third physiotherapist and a second assistant and dreams of taking the therapeutic golf concept national in some form.

Suggestions for future profiles can be e-mailed to newsdesk@lfpres.com or sent to Enterprise, c/o The London Free Press, 369 York St., London, Ont., N6A 4G1. Contact Christopher Clark at 519-667-5529. He's online at www.christopherclarkwriter.com

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