Multiple Sclerosis and Aquatic Therapy

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) attacks the central nervous system and can eventually impair, or disable, all motor ability in the affected individual. Not only their motor ability is affected, but they can also get an off-balanced feeling, double-vision, and a tingling sensation in their extremities. Aquatic therapy is used because it increases relaxation, confidence, and decreases muscle tension, improves the overall quality of life of the individual.

Aquatic therapy takes a variety of movement and activities that are mostly “land-based”, but are easier on the muscles and body, when done in the water. The techniques done in the water are used to increase self-awareness, emotional release, and relaxation. Relaxation is essential for those with MS because stress is one of the things that can induce the symptoms of the disease. The main reason that aquatic therapy is said to work so well for patients with multiple sclerosis is because of its buoyancy, or the ability to make a person float while submerged in water. When an individual with multiple sclerosis is in the water they feel weightless. This is beneficial because when someone is submerged in water, is decreases the impact on the muscular skeletal system. In addition to buoyancy, aquatic therapy uses hydrostatic pressure. This pressure keeps a person in the upright position and puts equal pressure on all sides of the body while in water. Hydrostatic pressure is great for people who have difficulty walking on land because the water does the work of keeping them upright for them. Another aspect of aquatic therapy that helps is the temperature of the water. The ideal temperature that the water should be is between 89.6 and 97 degrees Fahrenheit. Water in this temperature range increases relaxation and decreases muscle pain and spasticity. Since multiple sclerosis symptoms are stress and heat-induced, temperatures higher than those recommended are likely to cause fatigue. It is also a form of therapy that is being pushed to be expanded, and more popular, by the National Therapeutic Recreation Society (NTRS) and the American Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA). Overall, aquatic therapy provides physiological and physical benefits for individuals who have multiple sclerosis. This therapy helps a persons’ overall quality of life because if decreases the symptoms of multiple sclerosis. It is being promoted by the NTRS and ATRA to become a more well-known form of therapy.

Having an immediate family member with an incurable disease, such as multiple sclerosis, it always sheds some light to read about a way that the disease can be made less imposing on life. In this case, it was aquatic therapy for people with multiple sclerosis. Since this article is about helping individuals that have a physical disability through movements and activities done in the water, it is relevant to the field of therapeutic recreation. Therapeutic Recreation is solely about improving the overall quality of life of individuals that have a mental or physical disability. Aquatic therapy is all about improving the quality of life of people who have a disease that prevents them from being able to feel, walk, or have normal muscle movements. It is so great to know that there is a way for people to be treated for symptoms of an incurable disease, like multiple sclerosis. It not only sheds light on my life and my family member that is affected by it, but the population of those infected, not only by multiple sclerosis, but also other diseases that impair movement.