

Cardiac rehabilitation needs and preferences of women in rural areas: insights for tailored web-based program design for women

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Abstract

Aim: Due to the low attendance and completion of cardiac rehabilitation (CR) programs in women, this study aimed to identify the CR needs and preferences of women living in rural areas to inform the design of a web-based CR program using a person-centred care approach.

Methods: This qualitative study included 2-hour focus groups conducted in-person or online across six rural regions of South Australia. Women with cardiovascular diseases who had completed CR were included. A semi-structured questionnaire was developed to direct the interview discussions on the needs and preferences of women for different aspects of CR delivery. Data were transcribed verbatim, and thematic analysis was performed by two independent researchers using NVivo.

Results: Nineteen women (median age 69 years; range 41-82) participated. Six key themes were identified: (1) Financial concerns – transportation, specialist care, and prescription costs; (2) Importance of early education and support – addressing women-specific health concerns such as wound management, bras post-cardiac surgery, and menopause; (3) Educational session delivery – concise and interactive sessions; (4) Promoting participation in exercise – group-based and personalised exercise options; (5) Care – CR nurse as a key person in women's CR engagement; and (6) Technology and resources – a web-based program as a desirable and effective modality for early CR initiation and long-term cardiac health maintenance.

Conclusion Women are open to a web-based program as a means to access and participate in CR early after a cardiac event. Tailoring the educational and exercise program with the involvement of CR nurses through a financially viable model is preferred.