

Centre helping cancer patients faces closure

BY HELEN GREGORY

A NEWCASTLE centre that provides personalised and targeted exercise programs to people with cancer and chronic conditions will suspend its in-person services on Friday if it doesn't receive emergency assistance.

Director and founder of Warabrook's Kaden Centre, Sue Clark-Pitrolo, said two years of COVID-19 meant the health promotion charity had not been able to fundraise as much as it had hoped. "Finance is always a struggle and with the last round of COVID there was no [government] support," Mrs Clark-Pitrolo said. "Newcastle was getting hit so badly, clients were nervous."

"Over the last two years the ability to fundraise and the amount of donations coming in has declined a lot. We had a full year of not being able to fundraise at all. Last year we managed to get our golf day in, just, but we weren't able to do any of our other fundraising ideas."

"The doctors are now crying out, they immediately contacted us and said 'No you cannot close, you're integral in our cancer care here'. They're trying to rally the troops. They're pulling together the local data on the benefits their patients have received here. The clients are devastated, they're writing to their local members, they've contacted the council, they've started a petition. It's needed."

Mrs Clark-Pitrolo said she had donated the use of the premises and kept fees at 33 per cent of the cost of service to maintain affordability. She



ADJUNCT THERAPY: Bowel cancer survivor Di Gilbert, second from left, with manager Loukas Nadiotis, Sue Clark-Pitrolo and Olivia French, joined the centre seven weeks after her surgery. "I'm stronger and fitter than before all of this happened, I feel so good." Picture: Max Mason-Hubers

said she had unsuccessfully applied several times to the state and federal departments of health for help and grants, which she said were mostly for research or new projects. The *Newcastle Herald* contacted both departments for comment.

"If we can get some sort of intervention now and we can rebuild, what we would do is we would have to look at our business model and increase the fees significantly," she said. "That obviously hits every individual who comes in. We are a charity so we would still do the fundraising so that people who couldn't afford it or even a part of it, we would then use the charity arm to support them. It

is my goal and my hope and my wish that we never turn anybody away. It's a service that every single person diagnosed with cancer or a chronic condition should have access to and they won't after we go. It's the only one like this in Australia."

Mrs Clark-Pitrolo, who has survived breast, bowel and appendix cancer, said the exercise oncology service had helped more than 1200 people in four years, plus 300 through its online platform.

She said its practice was based on research by the 2019 Western Australia Premier's Scientist of the Year exercise physiologist Professor Robert Newton and others. The Clinical Oncology

Society of Australia [COSA] said clinical research had found exercise counteracts many adverse physical and psychological effects of cancer and its treatment, while emerging evidence highlighted that regular exercise decreases the severity of other adverse side effects and is associated with reduced risk of developing new cancers and comorbid conditions.

"Everything we do here is evidence-based and all of our clinicians are allied health professionals, either physiotherapists or exercise physiologists," she said. "Millions of dollars has gone into the research, but it didn't exist, so we've put it into practice. Everybody has a prescribed

exercise program, it's individualised and targeted to whatever their condition is, not just their fitness condition but their medical condition, their operation, the type of chemo, the type of cancer, their physical abilities and also their goals in life. It's the happiest place in the world to be, believe it or not, it's such a lovely community, people are in tears every day that we help them."

Mrs Clark-Pitrolo said the centre was one of only two services in the country to offer "prehab", for people who required chemotherapy before surgery and needed to rebuild their strength in six weeks before their operation. She said if the centre

closed its doors on Friday it would revert to its online program, through which clinicians meet with clients on Zoom for an assessment and then formulate a program that comes with explanatory videos and can be completed in a gym or without equipment at home. But she said it won't be the same without the community.

"I truly feel we have an injustice here," she said. "COSA has stated that every person diagnosed with cancer must be prescribed individualised targeted exercise from an allied health professional. We're doing it, we're trying to get it done for Australia but we're not getting the support to do it and it's just not fair."



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