



## **ExWell Medical Update**

### **What is ExWell Medical?**

ExWell Medical is a social enterprise with a not-for-profit ethos which offers chronic illness rehabilitation through structured, medically-led exercise programmes in community settings. ExWell was formed in January 2019 by Dr Noel McCaffrey to manage a national roll-out of a previous service (called MedEx) which had operated in DCU for 10 years and grew to become the largest centre of its kind in Europe, hosting 700 participant visits weekly and receiving up to 10000 new referrals annually. Its success caused mounting pressure to offer the service throughout Ireland and in 2019 a new entity (ExWell Medical) was formed to manage the national roll out.

ExWell has 4 sites in Dublin (Tallaght, Loughlinstown, Clontarf and Abbotstown) and 3 partner sites outside Dublin (Sligo, Kilkenny and Waterford). Before the lockdown, ExWell was hosting 1000 weekly visits across all these sites, with plans to develop new sites in Castlebar, Clonmel and Tralee

### **What is the Rationale for ExWell?**

The core rationale for ExWell is that a large part of the unwellness, disability and poor quality of life that occurs with any chronic illness is related to becoming deconditioned due to progressively reducing levels of physical activity. This leads to a downward spiral of deconditioning, reduced mobility, social isolation, loneliness, poor motivation, fear of exercise and further reduction in physical activity. This can be substantially reversed by appropriate exercise programmes. Group exercise has the added huge benefit of built-in social interaction. The combination of increased fitness and social engagement is life transforming and contributes to enhanced resilience and to reduced hospital visits and admissions.

Chronic illness care consumes 75% of Ireland's total annual health spend of €18 billion and affects 80% of people over the age of 65 yrs., a situation which is set to worsen as our population ages. Clinical exercise programmes cannot be delivered at scale in hospitals because of scarce resources and expense. ExWell offers a solution to this challenge which aligns with the core aspiration of Slaintecare by delivering its programmes in community settings.

### **Is there an evidence base?**

Based on a 3-year, HSE-funded evaluation of the DCU project, there is strong evidence that participation in the programme is linked to significant improvements in a diverse range of clinically important health outcomes, and also with reduced health care utilisation costs.

### **How has Covid-19 affected ExWell?**

The first lock down led to the suspension of ExWell's group classes and a switch over to an online programme. This was successful but the feedback was that it just wasn't the same as group classes,

where meeting people was a key factor in tackling loneliness and bring enjoyment and optimism into so many lives. Nevertheless, the online option is extremely effective in increasing access to the programme and this is very important as we strive to bring ExWell to all parts of Ireland.

In September, group classes resumed, only for Level 3 restrictions to mean that indoor classes had to be suspended again. Instead of closing down, we decided to start outdoor classes in small groups and this has turned out to be extremely popular. Participants really enjoy the fresh air and feel safer outdoors.

ExWell has been approved to continue operating during Level 5 and it is great to be able to continue offering what is a vital service during the Covid era.

### **The current situation**

The ExWell, programme is operating in Dublin, offering outdoor classes. Our plan is to reopen programmes across Dublin and in Sligo, Kilkenny, Waterford and Clonmel in the coming weeks. For other regions, the online option is available

### **Referral and Cost**

ExWell is a medically designed programme and requires a medical referral (to both the group classes and the online programme). It is aimed at people with long term illnesses. Referrals can be sent to us at [exwellmedical@healthmail.ie](mailto:exwellmedical@healthmail.ie), and full details of how to access the service are available on the website ([www.exwell.ie](http://www.exwell.ie)).

The cost structure is as follows:

- **Group Classes:** Induction cost €10. Participants are advised to attend twice weekly. Attending the group classes costs €10 per class or €70 per month for unlimited access.
- **Online programme:** The cost for the first month is €60, broken down as €10 for the induction lecture and testing, €15 for the manual, €15 for a group Zoom meeting with one of the medical team, €20 for the online classes (€5 per week). Thereafter the cost is €5 per week.

For further enquiries, please consult [www.exwell.ie](http://www.exwell.ie) or send a message to Lorraine Corcoran at [lcorcoran@exwell.ie](mailto:lcorcoran@exwell.ie)