

How fit the training

“When you talk about disease you change the playing field”

Anatomy classes, learning about the different ways to exercise, weeks in the gym learning about each piece of equipment and lessons about how to construct a tailor made program to fit each individual's need. These are the sorts of images in many people's minds when they walk into a gym and assign the management of their personal fitness with a 'fully' qualified personal trainer.

The fitness industry is experiencing a boom in Australia and as a result, there are thousands of businesses offering the courses necessary to begin a career in personal training.

Industry professionals are now raising concerns about the role of personal trainers in Australia and the comprehensiveness of the courses offered to those who wish to pursue a career in the fitness industry.

Course providers entice potential students with slogans such as “Fully qualified in just eight weeks” and “Fast Track your Career...Fully Online, Part-Time and Intensive courses” allowing students to complete the required Certificate IV in personal training via face to face study, distance education or online.

Most fitness providers allow students a maximum of one year to complete their Certificate IV with no minimum time frame for course completion. This means that fitness qualifications can be obtained in only a matter of weeks.

Fitness Australia and Kinect Australia are two independent, not-for profit organizations providing leadership and support to the fitness industry and to the public, whilst monitoring industry standards and registration processes.

Kinect Australia executive director, Ian Kett has expressed concern regarding the roles and responsibilities

of personal trainers, expressing the need for a tighter brief.

Kett said short course vocational training, like the Certificate III in Fitness – Gym Instructor and the Certificate IV in Fitness – Personal Trainer, are “the entrance points to the fitness industry,” but admits that he questions the level of understanding and capacity to deliver knowledge in such a short space of time.

“There are issues regarding the quality and level of understanding and capacity of instructors that still need to be addressed properly,” he said.

Although a valuable work force is being created because of these fast tracked short fitness courses, Kett said it is also about “recognizing the limitations of training and competency and creating links (with medical practitioners) to support those in the fitness industry”.

Further problems arise when personal trainers come across a client whose needs are different because they suffer

from a medical condition.

Australian Catholic University senior lecturer in exercise science, Dr Vanessa Rice said the scope of practice needs to be defined for personal trainers in Australia.

“Personal trainers should work with healthy populations, those considered low risk. When you talk about disease you change the playing field. Individuals should then move to an allied health practitioner,” Rice said.

The 2007/2008 National Health Survey indicated that 77 per cent of the Australian population reported having at least one long-term medical condition with just over one in six people reporting a disability or long term restrictive condition. Of these, 27 per cent had a significant core activity restriction.

Joel Carnegie and Natalie Marshall



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