

PEOPLE

Exercise helping fitness

McPhee looking forward to day he can breathe ... normally

By Jennifer Bell

The Intelligencer

TORONTO — Bill McPhee wipes the sweat from his forehead as he finishes a 10-minute session on the exercise cycle.

He's tired, but the Belleville man is ready for the next stage of his Wednesday workout session at The Toronto Hospital's treadmill room.

Around him are patients like himself; those waiting for lung transplants, or the lucky ones who have already had their surgery and are exercising with new vigor.

McPhee's wife Debbie is perched on a chair nearby, Bill's chart on her lap. He's scheduled for the treadmill next, she tells him, and then some weightlifting. Carefully, she loops the tubing that connects him to the room's oxygen supply neatly out of the way so it won't be stepped on or pulled loose.

For the 35-year-old man with a serious lung disease that's put him on The Toronto Hospital's critical waiting list for a double lung transplant, a 90-minute workout three times a week may seem incongruous.

But Cheryl Dear, a practice leader and member of the hospital's lung transplant program, says the stronger and more fit patients are before their surgery, the better their odds for a complete recovery.

"Maintaining and improving fitness before a transplant is vital. We usually see a noticeable improvement within eight to 12 weeks."

Dear checks McPhee's pulse before he moves to the treadmill, and records it as 120 beats per minute.

Not bad, says McPhee, "when you consider it was 138 before I started exercising this morning."

Exercise should boost, not lower, the pulse in healthy individuals, but McPhee's elevated heart rate is caused by the powerful steroids he takes daily to help him breathe and keep his lungs free of inflammation.

Physical activity helps slow his heart rate so he can relax and sleep better at night.

After weights and some deep stretching to expand the chest cavity, the McPhees head for home away from home in Toronto.

For now, that dwelling is a tiny one-bedroom apartment just behind Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens, and just minutes from the hospital.

It's cosy, however, and there's space for McPhee to use his exercise cycle and treadmill on the days he doesn't visit the hospital.

Its size also means he can easily navigate the rooms while hooked up to his ever-present oxygen tank.

It's been three weeks since the couple left their Belleville home to begin what could be a year-long wait for McPhee's double lung transplant.

Now that he's living the required proximity to Toronto Hospital, surgeons have placed him on the waiting list to receive the organs he desperately needs.

At 13, McPhee was treated for an infection with penicillin that caused a severe allergic reaction.

His lungs, damaged by scar tissue, began causing breathing problems for the teenager, which progressively worsened as he grew older.

For the last five years, he's lived with oxygen tubes in his

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