

Helping Hearts Heal

A Physiotherapist's Approach to Arrhythmia Recovery



John Broowin Anak Riah
Physiotherapist

For individuals diagnosed with arrhythmia, the path to recovery can be daunting. With symptoms like irregular heartbeat, fatigue, and dizziness, many patients fear that exercise may do more harm than good. But according to John Broowin Anak Riah, a physiotherapist experienced in cardiac rehabilitation, structured physiotherapy is not only safe — it's essential.

"The key is to develop personalized, progressive exercise plans that are closely monitored," said John. "Each patient's arrhythmia is different, and so is their tolerance to physical activity. We work to build their confidence while improving heart function in a controlled environment."

John's approach combines low to moderate-intensity aerobic exercise, light resistance training, and targeted flexibility routines. Using tools like the Borg Scale and telemetry monitoring, he ensures each patient exercises safely.

"Real-time monitoring helps us adjust intensity based on how the heart responds. It's especially critical for patients with pacemakers or a history of severe arrhythmia," he explained.

Breathing and relaxation techniques are also central to his program. "Controlled breathing — like diaphragmatic and pursed-lip breathing — helps regulate the autonomic nervous system. It improves oxygenation and calms the heart," said John. "We also use progressive muscle relaxation to address the stress that often triggers arrhythmic episodes."

In one standout case, John worked with a 55-year-old man recovering from atrial fibrillation and cardiac ablation. Initially plagued by anxiety and poor endurance, the patient began with short walks and gradually progressed to more structured strength and flexibility training.

"He went from fearing any exertion to confidently completing a 30-minute routine. Along the way, we worked with a psychologist and dietitian to ensure a holistic recovery," John recalled. "It was incredibly rewarding to see him regain both his physical function and peace of mind."

Collaboration, he notes, is vital. "We work closely with cardiologists, nurses, and other specialists to tailor care plans, monitor symptoms, and respond to emergencies. Rehabilitation is a team effort."

John is certified in Cardiac Rehabilitation (CCRS) and trained in Advanced Life Support, telemetry monitoring, and cardiopulmonary exercise testing. He regularly attends conferences and reviews research from leading journals to stay at the forefront of his field.

When asked about the challenges in treating arrhythmia patients, he cites fear and misunderstanding. "Many patients are afraid exercise will worsen their condition. I spend a lot of time educating them — not just on what to do, but why it's safe and beneficial."

Looking ahead, John sees great promise in technology. "Wearables and remote monitoring can transform cardiac rehab. They allow us to personalize care and track progress even outside the clinic," he said.

In the end, his goal is simple: to help patients reclaim their lives.

"With the right guidance, arrhythmia doesn't have to mean limitations. We can rebuild strength, reduce symptoms, and improve quality of life — one step at a time."



Two Decades in the Rhythm of the Heart

A Veteran Technologist's Journey Through Arrhythmia Care



Noor Asyikin Sahat
Senior Cardiovascular
Technologist Mentor, IJN

Equipped with 20 years of experience, Senior Cardiovascular Technologist (CVT) and mentor at Institut Jantung Negara (IJN), Noor Asyikin Sahat, remains committed to advancing cardiac care and nurturing the next generation of CVTs.

Eighteen of those years have been dedicated to electrophysiology (EP)—a highly specialised field focused on diagnosing and treating heart rhythm disorders such as ventricular tachycardia and atrial fibrillation. "Our job demands that we stay sharp, act fast, and support our medical teams in delivering advanced cardiac life support," she says.

At the core of her role is preparing patients for intricate procedures like EP studies, pacemaker or ICD implantations, and catheter ablations. From setting up 3D mapping systems to managing pacing stimulations and interpreting intracardiac signals, she is instrumental throughout the process. "We ensure everything is ready—from vital signs monitoring to sterile draping—before the technical work begins," she explains.

Her work doesn't end in the procedure room. Noor Asyikin also manages post-implant device follow-ups, ensuring pacemakers and defibrillators function properly. Any anomalies are flagged immediately to physicians for intervention.

A Certified Cardiac Device Specialist (CCDS), she actively attends global conferences and training sessions, supported by IJN's EP director, Datuk Dr. Azlan Hussin. With expertise in



advanced 3D mapping, she helps visualise arrhythmia origins more accurately—enhancing outcomes and procedural safety.

She also plays a vital role in clinical research, supporting both pre-market and post-market trials of cardiac devices. Her responsibilities include data collection, testing, and compliance with research protocols.

Mentorship is another cornerstone of her work. She trains students from IJN College and early-career technologists, guiding them through real-life cases. "I focus on teaching them how to think and act under pressure, because the stakes are always high," she says.

Despite her deep technical know-how, she never loses sight of the human element. Managing patient anxiety is a constant. "I treat every patient the way I'd want to be treated—calmly, kindly, and with respect," she says.

She recalls a moment mid-procedure when an amplifier failed with catheters already inside the heart. "We switched to the backup system seamlessly. Moments like that test your skill and your calm."

Looking ahead, she's hopeful that technology will become more accessible. "Devices are getting smaller and smarter, but affordability is key. If we can lower costs, we can change more lives," she says.