

## 116\_Huffines\_Simmons

### [Introduction]

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Hello and welcome to the weekly podcast from the Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance. I'm your host, Tim Lightfoot, and I'm so glad that you're taking the time to download us and you're listening. Every week we strive to bring you an interesting person in the world of sports medicine, human performance and general health many times. And this week is no exception. We are so pleased to have Ms. Jennifer Simmons with us. Welcome to the podcast, Jennifer.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** We're so glad to have you. I'm going to tell the folks a little bit about you and why we have you on and then we'll just jump into the conversation. Jennifer is currently the lead exercise physiologist at Iredell Memorial Hospital in Statesville, North Carolina. She does what we all call their cardiac rehabilitation. She has a master's degree in clinical exercise physiology from the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. She was one of my former students many years ago. Actually, she was one of the first three students that we had, actually, it was the first ever program in clinical exercise physiology in the country. And she is a certified health fitness specialist. She's a certified exercise specialist and she's also a registered clinical exercise physiologist. And those are the three highest clinical certifications that you can have as an exercise physiologist and it gives her the credentials to work with a wide variety of disease populations. So, again, welcome to the podcast, Jennifer and we're so glad you're here.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Thank you.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** We're going to talk about cardiac rehab today. Let's start off with an easy question, okay?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Okay.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** What's cardiac rehab?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Cardiac rehab is a great program that everybody needs to come to if you have any kind of heart event. What it does is help build your heart back and helps you recover from your event. It teaches you how to go back to do the activities in daily life. It involves nutrition and an exercise program.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** I think many people think of cardiac rehab as only exercise and we'll get back to the exercise part in a minute. But you just mentioned that it's kind of a holistic approach with a bunch of different things in it.

**Jennifer Simmons.** It is. There's the opportunity to meet with a dietician and learn about heart healthy eating, cooking, shopping for food. And then there's mental/emotional health aspect of it where you meet with a counselor and deal with stress, anxiety, things like that.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Is that special to just Iredell Memorial Hospital or is that kind of a national standard, that kind of holistic approach to cardiac rehab?

**Jennifer Simmons.** It's a national standard.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Isn't there something like you guys can't get reimbursement unless you have that kind of holistic program?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Exactly.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** And it's all about reimbursement, isn't it?

**Jennifer Simmons.** It is these days.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** We just jumped in. We talked about cardiac rehab but are those same principles applied to anything else like respiratory or any other kind of rehab programs?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Yes, pulmonary and cancer rehabilitation.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** That all falls under that umbrella as well. Let me back up. I guess when I was growing up, which was many, many years ago, when you had a heart attack, you were in the hospital for two weeks. At least two weeks and they didn't want you moving around. That's not the way it is anymore, is it?

**Jennifer Simmons.** No. We see people two to three days after having a stint placed, after having a MI. They come in to have a stress test to see where their baseline is, what they're able to do and we start from there.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** They try to get them out of bed pretty quick, don't they?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Yes, the next day after heart surgery.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** They've got them up and walking around, huh?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Yes.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** So it's unlike the old days. Now they want you up and moving around. Is there anything special that you do with folks that are – aren't you concerned when folks come in a couple of days after they've had a heart incident that they may have another one right there on you?

**Jennifer Simmons.** I try not to think about that, actually. We are very cautious. We are monitoring blood pressure, heart rhythm, heart rate. We know the medications and we start them out very slow. We let them start where they think they can and we gradually increase their intensity or the duration of their exercise until they're comfortable with it.

[05:02]

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** And most times you've got real time [monitor] on them so you're watching their heart rhythms as they go, right?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Yes.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** I read somewhere that the chance of a heart attack or cardiac event during exercise, especially in someone that's had a cardiac event already is about one in 26,000. Is that about right?

**Jennifer Simmons.** That sounds about right.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** So that's not a real big chance that something else is going to happen again, is there?

**Jennifer Simmons.** No.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** What are some of the benefits of cardiac rehab?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Physiological?

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Sure, any benefits. Why would you recommend? Let's say that one of your parents had a heart attack and they're talking about whether or not they're going to do cardiac rehab. I've seen numbers that suggest only about 20% of the people that are qualified for cardiac rehab actually go through cardiac rehab. What would you – what's something you would tell someone that's a benefit of doing cardiac rehab and why they should do it?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Overall, it really helps to build up your confidence and get over any kind of fear you may have. A lot of people are afraid to move. They're afraid to do anything that put exertion on their body. Give them the confidence to go back and live their life.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** That's a big issue, that people are afraid of doing daily things?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Yes, a lot of fear.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Really?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Here lately, we've had several people that have their event while they're out playing sports or playing with their kids or even exercising and they're scared. Who wouldn't be?

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** I'm assuming that you guys don't put them on sprint training immediately. What's the thing you would do in the first week or so after a heart event? I know you said you let them go at their own pace but is there any specific exercises that you do?

**Jennifer Simmons.** If they don't have any balance issues, if they're able to walk without any disturbances, then of course we do have the treadmill. We have a little sit down StepMill. I'm sure you've heard of the NuStep, it's a sit down stepper and [ground] bike. And for people who do have orthopedic problems, we have the upper body cycle. It's just a cycle for their arms. That's where we start most people and our goal is for them to do 15 minutes without stopping, increase their intensity from there. And as they become more endurance, we move them to more difficult things like the standing stepper and elliptical or rowing machines.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** So it's like training.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Yes.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** It gets harder as they go along.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Yes, that's what everybody tells me. They tell them I don't leave them alone. I make it harder.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** That's good.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Yes.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** About how long does someone go through cardiac rehab?

**Jennifer Simmons.** 36 visits to us.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** You sound pretty specific on that.

**Jennifer Simmons.** That's insurance mandated, 36 sessions.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Whether they're done or not in 36 sessions, they're done.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Sometimes with special circumstances we can get extensions from their physicians if it's people – you're having a lot of stable angina or they're on the list for a heart transplant, we can keep them longer.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Do you see most of your patients three times a week or twice a week?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Three times a week.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** So you're looking at a 12 week program there.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Yes.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** We come back and you said that one of the reasons to do cardiac rehab was to increase their confidence. Are there any other benefits to that, to doing cardiac rehab?

**Jennifer Simmons.** It helps lower their blood pressure, helps lower their cholesterol and that way they can hopefully decrease the amount of medications they take. That's a big thing for a lot of people, decreasing their meds.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** That would be a big positive. Does it decrease the chance of them having another cardiac event?

**Jennifer Simmons.** It does. A lot of statistics will show that people who have had a heart event have the greatest chance of having another event within the first three months after their initial event.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** So if you have one, you've got the biggest chance of having another one in three months, huh?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Yeah. That's why we like to capture people right after their event so they're with us and we can watch to see if anything is escalating up to another potential problem.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Right, right. With the cardiac rehab then that also decreases that risk, so it's kind of a double edged benefit there, isn't it?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Yes.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** We talked about – I know over my career I've seen a lot of changes in technology and the remote monitoring we used to do on patients is just so much better now. What other kind of new changes in technology are you seeing or have you seen in the last seven or eight years that you think is changing the field?

**Jennifer Simmons.** I have seen some changes in technology, not that I have it here.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Okay.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Of course now the use of devices like the iPad.

[10:03]

A lot of places have it where the monitoring is displayed on an iPad that people are walking around with and putting data on.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Really?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Mm-hmm. Being able to control exercise equipment from devices such as a portable device you can carry around.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** That's kind of cool. I like that idea of real time monitoring for everybody, almost. That would certainly cut down on the cost. I'm sure they would use a polar heart band, something like that, that's streamed out to the iPad.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Right.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** That's kind of cool. What else? That would certainly help the patients take more control of their health when they can see it like that.

**Jennifer Simmons.** We're trying to really teach people not only the days that you don't come exercise here but once you graduate to be thinking of ways. How am I going to monitor myself? So we really do try to encourage people to get, like the polar heart rate monitor, so they know what they're doing on their own.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** From my past history, working in cardiac rehab was very rewarding because you saw huge success stories. You have any patient success stories that you'd like to share with us that maybe really have touched you?

**Jennifer Simmons.** I have to say overall, one that really sticks out in my mind is we had a gentleman come through who had severe cardio myopathy. Lived with chest pains and shortness of breath all the time and was on the list for a transplant. And I think it was three Christmases ago, on Christmas Day, he got the call to go to the hospital to get his heart. And so he was with us, I believe it was about four weeks later. He was with us for the three month session and on his first day, right after you have a heart transplant, you're very weak, not only from the actual procedure but the medications that you're on to suppress your immune system.

So his goal was to play basketball, play like a game of Horse with me when he finished cardiac rehab. I kept telling him, "I'll play. I'll play. I'll play." After he finished his cardiac rehab, and for his first day he did maybe five, six, seven minutes of exercise – out, wiped out and then progressively increased his exercise. He became our poster child. He went to places and gave his success story about how it changed his life and how exercise is now a part of his life. And it was about the next June, July, he and I met at a gym and had a game of Horse. It was fun. It was really great to see him come full circle.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** I'm going to ask, of course, since this is a sports medicine podcast, who won?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Oh...

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Don't tell me you don't remember.

**Jennifer Simmons.** No, actually he did. He did, yeah. He played on a consistent basis. After his rehab, he went and played with a group of men. He was about in his sixties.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** So you're telling me he prepared for you.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Yeah. He was a little more prepared than me. I haven't really had a lot of opportunity to practice my shooting so he was a little better than me.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** We have quite a few people that listen to this podcast and they may have people in their lives that are looking at cardiac rehab or have cardiac events. We had a doctoral student here a couple of years ago that had a heart event. When they start considering cardiac rehab, what kind of qualifications are you looking for in the professionals that are going to be working in cardiac rehab, that you're going to be working with?

**Jennifer Simmons.** Of course, people who are very caring and compassionate. People who see an opportunity to go help someone and they just go do it. You don't have to tell. It's not like you have to direct people, this is what you're supposed to do when you're here. They just know. It's just like an instinct for them to go do something. We look for that a lot in our interns. It's just some people just know what to do. They see a situation like say for instance a patient is on a treadmill exercising and their color doesn't look so good and you notice they're getting a little short winded. And someone who knows to instinctively to go over there and are you okay? Let's slow down. Let's stop. Let's get something to drink. Someone who has that kind of instinct of knowing what to do and not panicking, what we're looking for.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** What about educational? Can anybody just walk in off the street and work in cardiac rehab?

[14:58]

**Jennifer Simmons.** No. I guess what you would call their basic qualification here would be a bachelor's degree in an exercise science field, either the ACSM clinical exercise specialist or the registered clinical physiologist certification.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** So people that are doing your job, they have some clinical training. It's a clinical profession like any other.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Yes.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Okay, super. And while we're talking about those credentials, when did you decide you're going to cardiac rehab and what led you to that? That's one of the things that we often ask our guests. What led them to do what they're doing and how can other people become like you?

**Jennifer Simmons.** I was always interested in the sports medicine field and I've always exercised, worked out. I've played sports ever since I was a teenager and I thought I was going to go the nursing route. I started out in nursing in high school and really liked it but just wanted something more, something that I felt would be – that I could take my interest in exercise sports and really help somebody. And of course you know physical therapy comes into mind and

things like that. But after I had a family member, who was my grandfather, actually, had a massive heart attack, I became interested in the heart.

And I really can't remember how I found out about exercise science. When I was in high school, I decided I was going to go to Appalachian and thought something about athletic training and go into sports medicine from there. And worked with a girl in the housing office who was an exercise science major, cardiac rehab, and I thought that sounds kind of neat. It put my interests all in one and then from there on, I just went down that road.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** And it's interesting, how many times we talk to people who have had a family member affected by whatever they wound up working in and that's led them to go on and try to make things better for people.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Really has an impact on you. You really want to help prevent that for someone else in that situation.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Jennifer, thank you for taking the time to talk to us today. We're running a little short on time. And as we always do, we ask our guests to leave us with a take home message that the audience can remember from this podcast.

**Jennifer Simmons.** My message would be or is, as far as there's so many important things in life that we don't have a whole lot of control over but things that we can control, we need to try to control in order to help our health. Your health is very important. I think exercise is something that you can do to keep your health. Everyone wants to stay in good health so I would say exercise. Try to plan your day around it daily. Make it a part of your routine.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Great take home message. Sounds like you've been listening to some of our past podcasts. That's one of the things we keep saying. Either that or you had really excellent professors in the past.

**Jennifer Simmons.** That is probably it.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** That's probably it. Thank you for taking the time to be with us today.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Thank you so much for having me.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** You're more than welcome and thank you all for listening, for taking the time to download and listen. And if you've been a regular listener of our podcast, you know that at this point is when we do our podcast question of the week and here with that question is Cheryl.

**Cheryl.** When is the greatest chance for a cardiac patient to experience a second cardiac event?

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** Excellent question. Be the first one to send us the correct answer to that question at [huffinespodcast@hlkn.tamu.edu](mailto:huffinespodcast@hlkn.tamu.edu) and you'll win one of those nifty podcast t-shirts and



you will be the first listener to win the third edition podcast t-shirt so hurry in with those questions. So if you've won one of the ones before, now you can answer again because now we've got a new edition t-shirt ready to go. And so with that, again let me thank you all for listening. Jennifer, let me thank you again for taking time out of your busy day to visit with us.

**Jennifer Simmons.** Thank you so much.

**Dr. Tim Lightfoot.** You're welcome and again I hope all of you join us next week for another interesting person in the world of sports medicine and human performance. And until then, we hope that you have an active and healthy week.

**[Conclusion]**

**[20:25]**

**[END]**