



Musculoskeletal injury prevention expert Hennie working on best practice manual for red meat sector

After a long career as a Clinical Exercise Physiologist and lecturer, Hennie Pienaar is now focusing his work and study on musculoskeletal injury prevention and wellbeing in the meat sector.

MIA post graduate scholar Hennie, from Invercargill, is combining his role as Group Musculoskeletal Injury Prevention Manager for Alliance Group with studying for his PhD on the subject of 'Managing Musculoskeletal injuries in the meat processing industry'.

His goal is for his thesis to take the form of a manual showing what steps can be implemented to become best practice for musculoskeletal injury prevention in the red meat industry.

The MIA awards six undergraduate scholarships providing \$5,000 a year for each year of study and four post-graduate scholarships of \$10,000 for each year of study annually. They are aimed at students considering a future in New Zealand's red meat sector. The MIA also runs a mentoring programme for its scholars, including a networking and educational event each year in Wellington.

Hennie has a Master's degree in human movement science and practised as a Biokineticist - or physical therapist – in his native South Africa before moving to New Zealand 20 years ago to take up a lecturing position at Southern Institute of Technology (SIT). He taught biomechanics, exercise physiology, exercise rehabilitation and human anatomy for 18 years.

He is accredited as a musculoskeletal injury specialist with Exercise and Sports Science Australia and in clinical exercise physiology with the NZ Clinical Physiology Board.

"Our students at SIT each had to do a case study, working with someone pro bono," says Hennie. "I worked on developing that programme around cardio-pulmonary, musculoskeletal health and wellness, which are my areas of interest, and it made me realise that I missed that 'hands on' part of helping people.

"One of the case studies we looked at was someone who was struggling to recover from a long-term injury that occurred while the client was working in the meat industry."

Hennie joined Alliance in December 2019. His work has included developing a range of programmes to support musculoskeletal health and wellbeing among the work force.

“I also do inductions and workshops, teaching best techniques for improving manual handling skills, stretching techniques and how to manage injuries,” he says.

“I work with supervisors to help them to recognise signs of injury and discomfort among workers so they can encourage them to seek help early. I also work one-on-one with people who have injuries.

“I also do a lot of wellness work. Working in the meat industry can be very physical, and helping people understand how they can look after themselves, enjoy work and live better and fuller lives, is both challenging and rewarding.”

Hennie had already completed the first year of a five-year PhD programme through Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi (Whakatane campus) before leaving SIT. Initially he was focusing on managing lower back pain with the help of mobile technology, but having joined Alliance, he decided to focus on a more industry-related topic.

“I am very grateful to have MIA support to help with my research related costs,” he says. “I am particularly looking forward to new opportunities for networking, and the sharing of ideas with other people from the industry.”