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An evidence-based physical exercise protocol for people living with dementia in nursing homes

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Abstract
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Background: Physical activity has many benefits for older people but there is limited evidence evaluating the specific benefit for people with a dementia, in particular for those living in residential accommodation. This makes it difficult to determine the optimum parameters of physical activity for this population.

Aim: To present a protocol of a physical activity study which tested the effects of an intervention on health outcomes and the well-being of people living with a dementia in residential accommodation. The protocol was generated from a systematic review of physical activity interventions with people living with a dementia.

Method: The systematic review was used to develop an evidence based protocol for a physical activity intervention undertaken with people living with a dementia in residential accommodation by a physiotherapy doctoral candidate in South Australia.

Findings: The physical activity protocol consisted of a range of physical mobility activities (strength, balance, endurance and flexibility) for two groups of participants: (i) physically active individuals and (ii) individuals participating in sitting activities. This ensured most people with a dementia were eligible to participate in the study. The effectiveness of the protocol was tested through a randomised controlled trial. The health outcome measures were a range of mobility measures and well-being was measured using the Cohen-Mansfield Agitation Inventory.

Conclusion: An evidence-based physical activity protocol for people living with a dementia in residential accommodation was implemented and tested using a randomised controlled trial. The findings identified the strength, balance, endurance and flexibility physical activities which are specifically effective for: (i) physically activity individuals and (ii) individuals participating in sitting activities. The findings are being implemented by the doctoral candidate as she continues her work as a physiotherapist with people living with a dementia in residential accommodation.