



Pathways to Progress: Healthcare Access in Rural Victoria

Abstract title: Developing unconventional approaches for group-based physiotherapy exercise programs in rural residential aged care settings: An Occupational Therapy perspective

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Introduction:

Ageing can result in a decrease of skeletal and muscular function followed by decreased physical performance, challenges in maintaining activities of daily living (ADL) and reduced quality of life. This highlights the role of accessible exercise programs in supporting the physical wellbeing of older populations, particularly the users of residential aged care (RAC) facilities where the long-term nursing care can pose a risk of forming sedentary lifestyles and thereby diminishing physical capacities among RAC users. Although creative approaches in providing geriatric care have been explored, less is known about the effectiveness of establishing unconventional methods of exercise programs in RAC settings.

Objective:

To determine the efficacy of unconventional approaches for group-based physiotherapy (PT) exercise programs in RAC settings using an occupational therapy (OT) perspective.

Methods:

In three regional aged care facilities, unconventional group-based PT exercise programs have been introduced, featuring a 1:5 ratio of Allied Health Professionals (AHP) or Allied Health Assistants (AHA) to residents per session. These programs are administered using the following methods:

- Sport-Themed Method: Physical exercises are determined by the residents' selection of the sports within a sport list designed by AHP, where exercises mimic the movements associated with these chosen sports.
- Competition-Based Method: Groups can participate in friendly competitions where two residents representing their respective teams engage in the customised exercise sets designed to align with each participant's allied health treatment plan, fostering a sense of teamwork.
- Occupation-Based Strategy: Functional exercises to practise completing the ADL can be integrated, with a focus on self-care and domestic tasks. Coaching on the use of assistive aids and task modifications can be implemented by AHP/AHA.
- Dance-Based Fitness Program with Music: Dance-based exercise techniques are designed, customised to the allied health treatments, and implemented in the group setting. The inclusion of music can be maintained throughout the session simulating a dancing class.
- Task Completion with The Station Rotation Model: Rotation to each station for completing a series of tasks is requested to each resident, where tasks can be customised to the exercise programs with a special focus to improve coordination.

Outcomes:

Preliminary findings suggest a noteworthy rise in the level of engagement within our group-based PT exercise programs, accompanied by an increased level of active participation during these sessions. Valuable feedback from our residents has revealed their enthusiasm for these approaches. The unconventional methods have the potential to create a dynamic, engaging and captivating environment within aged care facilities, enhancing the overall physical exercising experience for residents.

Conclusion:

Reduced physical capacities in older populations during ageing emphasises the importance of exercise-based interventions in maintaining physical wellbeing for RAC users, underscoring the imperative for health professionals to employ creative strategies when designing group exercise sessions. Adopting unconventional approaches, rooted in OT perspectives, has the potential to greatly improve resident participation, levels of engagement, and overall satisfaction with these allied health exercise programs. This study's findings also underscore the crucial importance of collaborative efforts between PT and OT, promoting a multidisciplinary approach within the aged care sector.