Improving exercise interventions for older people with sarcopenia and frailty: a nationwide benchmarking and feedback initiative for service development

You are invited to take part in a new nationwide service improvement project run in collaboration between the AGE Research group at Newcastle University, the British Geriatrics Society and AGILE (a professional network of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists)looking at exercise interventions for older people living with sarcopenia and frailty in the UK.

Supporting older people to age well was recognised in 2019's NHS Long Term Plan as a key area for consideration in the development of NHS services in the 21st century. In addition, the James Lind Alliance, which works together with patient groups, identified work into acceptable and effective exercise interventions as one of their top ten priorities for research into multiple conditions in later life.

Sarcopenia, a reduction in muscle strength and function, and frailty, are common conditions affecting many older people living in the UK today. Associated with an increased risk of falls, fractures, and lengthy hospital admissions, they also carry a significant personal burden with affected individuals reporting increased dependence and an overall impaired quality of life. A growing body of evidence supports resistance exercise training as a safe and effective intervention in sarcopenia and frailty. However, recent surveys of current practice have found that this was offered in only 9% of departments delivering exercise interventions to older people.

Delivering effective, evidence-based exercise interventions for older people living with, or at risk of sarcopenia and frailty, has the potential to improve quality of life and reduce associated morbidity for affected individuals.

What are the aims of this project?

This project aims to identify and promote those particular characteristics of exercise interventions that result in best outcomes for older people living with sarcopenia and frailty. We are inviting physiotherapists and exercise practitioners across the UK to feedback details of the exercise interventions they currently offer to older people with sarcopenia and frailty and the outcomes for patients. This information will be used to inform a series of national recommendations for best practice and drive service development.

What will participating in the project involve?

You will be asked to upload anonymised data for twenty consecutive individuals who receive exercise training for sarcopenia and/or frailty in your service. We will ask you to enter the data via an online survey.

Questions will cover different aspects of the exercise interventions being delivered including:

- Baseline patient details such as age and sex
- Reasons for referral
- Characteristics of the intervention offered including methods of training
- Frequency, duration and intensity of the exercise interventions
- Progression of exercises
- Patient outcomes and the methods used to assess these

Each site will be given a personalised identifier and up to two individuals per site will be able to enter data via the online portal. There are twenty-nine questions/fields in total however not all are mandatory. You do not need to complete the entire survey for an individual in one sitting. Data inputted can be saved and retuned to at a later data prior to final submission. Overall, we estimate that completion of the survey for one individual will take around 15 minutes. Should you have any queries regarding data entry, technical support will be available via philip.heslop@ncl.ac.uk throughout the project.

What are the intended outcomes of the project?

Data collected will undergo analysis by the project team and review by an expert panel of to identify which aspects of practice are associated with best patient outcomes. This will inform the production of a series of recommendations for best practice which will be disseminated nationally.

Individual participants will be offered personalised feedback from our panel and signposting towards resources (such as the latest research) that will be helpful for CPD and for service redesign. In addition, you will receive a tailored, personalised report that shows how your practice compares to aggregate data from all the other participating sites.

Is this research, and do I need to get consent from my patients?

No - this is classed as a service improvement project. As such, you do not need to gain consent or permission from patients, and no research ethics permissions are required. The data we ask you to upload does not contain anything that would enable patients to be identified outside your Trust. The only local permission that you will need to acquire is approval from your local Caldicott Guardian.

Can more than one person at each site input data?

Up to two participants can enter data for each site.

Will other sites be able to see how my programme performs?

No – all data will be anonymised in aggregate reports