

OPERA - Older People's Exercise intervention in Residential & nursing Accommodation

Exercise for reducing depression among elderly care home residents.

Researchers at the University of Warwick and Queen Mary, University of London have shown that exercise is not effective in reducing burden of depression among elderly care home residents.

Exercise is a low risk intervention that can improve mental health but the findings of a National Institute for Health Research Health Technology Assessment Programme study, published in The Lancet, conclude that there is a requirement for alternative approaches to reduce the burden of depression in frail, very elderly, care home residents.



The large randomised controlled trial sought to discover whether an intervention that

combined a twice-weekly, moderately intensive exercise sessions over the course of a year and promotion of physical activity by care home staff would reduce depression. Over 1,000 residents were recruited from 78 UK care homes. Nearly half of the frail elderly care home residents recruited to the study were suffering from depression. The intervention was well received in the homes and popular with residents but it had no effect on depression, or residents' general quality of life.

Martin Underwood, Professor of Primary Care Research at Warwick Medical School, who led the research team, said, "We are disappointed that this exercise intervention had no effect on the serious problem of depression with the care home residents.

We already know that antidepressants are effective for more severely depressed patients, while preventive strategies such as increased social engagement and psychological stimulation are promising but as yet unproven. New approaches are clearly needed to address the major burden of depression in this most needy population.

With the number of people needing residential care predicted to continue rising year on year, it is ever more important that residents have access to effective interventions to improve their mental health.

"I would stress that these results only apply to care home residents and only to depression; there is no doubt that exercise improves fitness and physical health in younger people and in fitter elderly people."

Professor Martin Underwood – University of Warwick

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