Critique of “Assessing Balance and Fall Efficacy in Community-Dwelling Older Adults”

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By the year 2030, an estimated 20% of the US population will be classified as an “older adult” (Skalko, Sauter, Burgess, & Loy, 2013). This increase in the geriatric population will mean greater health care needs and services. But with this increase in health care needs, comes an increased desire to stay independent and maintain a positive quality of life. The article by Skalko, Sauter, Burgess, and Loy, focuses on the problem of older adults experiencing increasing health problems due to falling (Skalko et al., 2013). These falls negatively affect the individual’s quality of life. Studies have used specific instruments to assess an individual’s risk of falling, and techniques to prevent and reduce falls for this baby-boomer generation.

**Summary**

To assess and track the balance of an individual, and therefore their risk of falling, three assessment instruments were used. The Activities-specific Balance Confidence Scale, the Multi-directional Reach Test, and the 8-foot Up and Go were the instruments identified in the article. These tests were simple and straightforward, and proved effective in providing valid and reliable information.

Three intervention strategies were also chosen for the studies: Tai Chi, Matter of Balance, and Nintendo Wii. These three strategies were each “utilized to improve functional balance, fall efficacy and promote higher levels of physical activity among this specific population, with the ultimate goal of providing older adults with an overall improved quality of life and sustained independence” (Skalko et al., 2013, p. 297).

Tai Chi strategy originated from an ancient Chinese martial art. Focusing on both the mind and body, it uses slow, rhythmic movements, relaxing muscles, and breathing and concentration techniques. The Matter of Balance strategy places more emphasis on the physical activity of the interventions. Matter of Balance is a program where older adults can participate in
a certain number of sessions that incorporate warm-up, stretching, and cool-down routines. At the end of completion, the individuals receive a certificate for completing the program. A more recently adopted modality is Nintendo Wii, that uses virtual reality technology for therapy. Nintendo Wii’s “game-like elements” attract patients and could incentivize patients to participate in therapy (Skalko et al., 2013).

Each of these three modalities aim to improve the physical activity and physical strength of older adults in a community-based setting. Physically stronger individuals fall less, and therefore maintain greater independence and a more positive quality of life.

Strengths

Using intelligent, academic language, the article was able to convey the information in a manner that readers could understand without a lot of knowledge of the subject matter. The studies themselves were simple for participants, yet well thought out and effective in acquiring the information needed. Ensuring best results, individuals were given the option of completing a practice trial run before the actual measurements were taken.

Another strength that stood out to me was the use and implementation of the TR process. While the article heavily focused on the assessment and implementation steps, it effectively demonstrated the entire process (APIE).

Weaknesses

Even though the article proved to be well-researched, there were still weaknesses that should be addressed and improved on. One in particular was with the Matter of Balance program. While the implementation of the program is effective, it includes only a few sessions of physical activity, after which the participants get a certificate of completion and are finished. I’m sure the participants are encouraged to keep up the physical activity that they learn, but most
people lack the self-discipline to exercise on their own. I think this program could be more effective if modified for long-term assistance.

**Application**

Any health care setting serving older adults can apply the findings from this article. Rehabilitation units in hospitals could use the assessments and intervention techniques to help people recover from falls and reduce the likelihood of them happening again. Assisted living centers and nursing homes could hold morning exercise routines of Tai Chi or Nintendo Wii to help residents improve balance and hopefully decrease the probability of falling.

**Personal interest**

My purpose in studying therapeutic recreation has been to learn skills necessary to work with the older adult population in an effort to help improve their quality of life. I have always loved interacting with elderly people, specifically with my own aging family members. But having seen my own family members suffer health problems due to falls, this article struck home with me. I have witnessed their independence and quality of life deteriorate. I appreciated how this article specifically used the TR process (that I am learning about in class) to assess and implement plans in regards to the problem of older adults falling.

**Conclusion**

With the dramatic increase in the older adult population, the health care field will likely see more health problems, specifically due to falls. Skalko, Sauter, Burgess, and Loy effectively addressed the role therapeutic recreation can play in assessing the risk of falling, as well as providing interventions that can prevent and reduce the probability of falling (Skalko et al., 2013). Using the TR process, older adults can have more resources to keep their independence and quality of life positive for a longer period of time.
References