

DO NURSING HOME AND “ASSISTED LIVING” RESIDENTS IN THE CANTON OF BERN HAVE ACCESS TO EVIDENCE-BASED EXERCISE PROGRAMS?

BACKGROUND:

Evidence-based exercise such as resistance and balance training, weight training with machines, Tai-chi and aerobic activities have been shown to increase functional abilities, decrease the risk of falling, prevent / compress morbidity and prolong life expectancy in the older, community-living *and* institutionalized population. The goal of the study was to find out whether or not the residents of the nursing homes and attached assisted living facilities of the canton of Bern have access to evidence-based exercise.

METHODS:

A written questionnaire was sent to all the nursing homes listed on the cantonal list. The results were analyzed descriptively as to whether or not the exercise offers appeared to be evidence-based or not, also looking at what percentage of the residents took part. Potential reasons for differences between homes were explored.

RESULTS:

Of the 294 homes in the survey population, 152 returned a questionnaire. At least 67% of responder homes appeared to offer some type of strength, 55% balance, and 44% aerobic training, albeit in the majority for < 50% of residents. Almost a third of the responder homes reported offering access to a *combination* of strength, balance *and* aerobic exercise. Walking and mobility/gait training were offered by 60 to 77% of responder homes. 28/152 (18% of responder homes) had weight machines, but not always for all major muscle groups. Only 12 of the 28 homes with weight machines reported using them in supervised offers.

CONCLUSIONS:

The nursing homes put in a lot of effort into providing exercise offers in a context of limited time and staff. Investing in equipment and staff so that more homes can offer a combination of evidence-based strength, balance and aerobic training and can reach a greater percentage of residents could have public health and economic benefits. Current nursing home reimbursement methods do not favor preventive interventions.