Initiation and Maintenance of Participation in a Local Mall Walking Program

Evan Whitson & Kimberly Pineda, BSN Students; Basia Belza, PhD, RN, FAAN, Aljoya Endowed Professor in Aging

Background

- Malls provide a “safe, accessible, and affordable exercise environment for middle-aged and older adults” (Farren et al., 2015).
- Despite the availability of mall walking programs, barriers to mall walking include lack of transportation, illness and symptoms, and lack of appropriate footwear (Farren, Belza et al., 2015).

Purpose

- To better understand mall walkers’ reasons for initiating and maintaining walking in a local mall walking program.

Methods

- This quality improvement project included mall walking club members and residents or a retirement community.
- Presentation to residents of a retirement community who after the presentation completed surveys about benefits of walking.
- One-on-one interviews conducted during 5 Saturdays from February to March 2016 with a local mall walking club.

Results

Mall Walking Club Members Interviewed: 10
- Age: 71-90 years old
- Sex: M (2) and F (8)
- Level of Education: 80% have a college degree of higher

Feedback from 15 attendees of a mall walking presentation at Aljoya Thornton Place

Major Themes

- Most prevalent reasons for initiating and maintaining mall walking participation were:
  - Socialization
  - Health Improvement
  - Health Maintenance

Initiation

- “It’s nice that the mall is close by.”
- “I like the mental health benefits of walking.”
- “Value of exercise”

Challenges

- “Walking on hard surfaces is hard because of my arthritis.”
- “How much should I walk with atrial fibrillation?”
- “I can’t go mall walking on Saturday mornings.”

Maintenance

- “Sense of community”
- “Use it or lose it.”
- “Patty makes a difference.”
- “I can walk anywhere, but walking with friends makes a difference.”

Challenges

- “…fear of falling”
- “I wish we could carpool or have a better way to get here.”
- “…pain, shortness of breath, and other symptoms associated with chronic conditions”

Discussion

- Mall walkers recognized the benefits of mall walking and the importance of the involvement of healthcare providers (HCPs), such as physical therapists, to make the most of their walking experience.
- Majority of mall walkers reported having chronic pain or conditions that hinder participation. Involvement of HCPs in information dissemination and health promotion could be vital to initiation and maintaining participation.
- A limitation of the project was that the population interviewed/surveyed may not be representative of individuals who are unable to participate or maintain participation due to personal barriers (finances, access to transportation etc.).

Conclusion

- Mall walking has socialization and health benefits and plays a role in both maintaining and initiating mall walking.
- Future studies may benefit from targeting mall walking engagement efforts toward recruiting and maintaining participation among lower income communities. Mall walking is free and a potentially a great resource for those who have limited alternatives for physical activity.
- Community health care providers can promote wellness by referring those who may benefit to mall walking programs.

Mall Walking: Benefits for walking

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