

Research translates into successful community practice to improve elder health

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It is not easy to translate research into practice, and a therapy that works well in the sterile research lab is not always successful in the real world. Researchers across the country are driven not only to discover new treatments but also to make sure their treatments are designed to be used successfully in a variety of community settings.

In the July issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*, Oregon Research Institute (ORI) senior scientist Fuzhong Li, Ph.D., describes how senior community centers in Lane County, Oregon successfully adopted an evidence-based Tai Chi program to prevent falls among older adults. Based on this success, the Oregon Department of Human Services, in partnership with 4 counties in Oregon, has now adopted the Tai Chi program as part of its efforts to disseminate evidence-based interventions to promote physical activity and reduce falls among community-living older adults.

"Our results are very important from a public health perspective," says Li. "The U.S. population is aging rapidly and falls are a leading cause of mortality and morbidity among adults age 65 and older. Falls are associated with an enormous burden to individuals, society, and to the health care system. Tai Chi, as a proven fall intervention, may have much to offer in terms of reducing the public health burden of falls and the benefits accrued for prevention."

The study was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to determine how well the exercise program translated into

positive results when taught in community centers by lay people. There is wide recognition within public health that proven programs must be translated, implemented and adopted to have widespread effects. In previously-funded research, the Tai Chi program developed by Li and his team showed positive results in improving balance and reducing falls among the elderly.

Twice-weekly 1-hour classes were held in local senior centers in for 12 weeks. Trained tai chi instructors delivered the program. Li and his team assessed several factors including how many centers adopted the program, whether teachers and staff were successful in implementing key elements of the program, and whether participants in the tai chi sessions experienced healthy benefits. Also of critical importance is whether the community center was willing to consider tai chi as part of its regular programs, and the extent to which participants continued their tai chi practice once the 12 weeks were over.

Results indicated that the all centers invited agreed to participate and all participating centers successfully implemented the program. Program participants showed significant improvements in health-related outcome measures such as balance, reduction in falls, and increased functional independence. Tai chi has been considered a low-cost exercise activity because no equipment and few facilities are needed. These results indicate that an evidence-based tai chi program can be implemented in urban and rural community settings.

Source: Oregon Research Institute

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