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Falls prevention in Parkinson's disease

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A study carried out by the Primary Care Research Group at the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry, supported by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and NIHR PenCLAHRC, has analysed the results of an exercise programme to prevent falls in those with Parkinson's disease.

The study was instigated because, to date, there are few trials that have examined the benefit of such interventions to people with Parkinson's disease. The research team used a randomised controlled trial to track the effectiveness of an exercise programme for people with Parkinson's disease who had a history of falls and reported a reduction in falls among those that received the intervention.

Despite limitations in the number of people who took part in the study, the research team was able to log significant improvements in balance, a decrease in the fear of falling and increased levels of physical recreational activity.

As a result, the findings of the study add to the evidence base for physiotherapy and exercise in the management of people with Parkinson's disease. Further studies involving a greater number of people with Parkinson's disease and a longer follow-up period will help to support this case, as well as identify which interventions work the best under which circumstances.

Up to two-thirds of people with Parkinson's experience falls each year: this compares with a third of the general community-based elderly

population who experience falls. When a person with Parkinson's falls, the impact is widespread affecting patients, families and health and social care organisations. Falls and associated injuries are the main cause of hospital admissions among people with Parkinson's, resulting in extended hospital stays which put pressure on both the patient and the NHS.

Dr. Vicki Goodwin, PenCLAHRC Senior Research Fellow at the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry and who conducted this study as part of her PhD funded by a NIHR Researcher Development Award, commented: "Ours is one of the first studies to seek evidence for the effectiveness of interventions, and as such it is an important step towards understanding the best ways in which to help those with Parkinson's disease both deal with and prevent further falls. As well as the physical effects of a fall, people with Parkinson's also suffer psychologically, often reporting a lack of confidence across the spectrum of everyday life activities, thus affecting quality of life."

She added: "It is clear that intervention programmes to prevent falls in those with Parkinson's disease do have the potential to work, but more research is needed before we have the knowledge necessary to recommend definitive approaches to this growing issue."

Provided by The Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry

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