Exercise improves the health and well-being of people with dementia

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Introduction

• Dementia is the leading cause of disability among older Australians, accounting for nearly 17% of their disability burden and is projected to become the third greatest source of health and aged care spending within two decades.

• Approximately 90% of older people with dementia in residential aged care facilities (RACFs) will experience behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD) at some time during the course of this syndrome.

• Studies supporting the effectiveness of antipsychotic medication in modifying BPSD are limited.

• Safe alternative treatments for BPSD are required, especially non-pharmacological strategies.

To determine the effect of an aquatic exercise program, the Watermemories Swimming Club (WSC), on behavioural, psychological, and physical wellbeing of community dwelling people with dementia and their family carers.

Methods

• Participants with dementia, with at least one BPSD, participated in the WSC twice a week for 12 weeks.

• Baseline: Psychological Well-Being in Cognitively Impaired Persons (PW-BCIP) and the Revised Memory and Behaviour Problems Checklist (RMBPC); for their family carer, the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) and the Caregiver Hassles Scale (CHS).

• The dyad was assessed again after completion of the 12-week program and scores compared to baseline.

Results

Six participants and their family carers, were enrolled and five dyads completed the trial (mean age of person with dementia: 71.8 years (SD 12.8)).

Of the six participants, 2 were females and 4 were males. One dropped out due to ill health.

A trend towards improvement in revised memory and behaviour reaction was observed, but not in psychological well-being.

Family carers did not show positive trends for general health or carer burden.

Discussion

• Aquatic exercises may be a non-pharmacological treatment option for individuals with BPSD.

• There was a trend towards improvement in RMBP.

• There was a benefit of weekly aquatic exercises for older people with dementia living in RACFs with positive trends in BPSDs activities of daily living, and RMBP.

• Dementia poses difficulties with social networks and institutional environments along with rising costs of care and greater degree of burden for carers.

• Outcomes are positive in light of the current management of dementia patients.

Limitations & Recommendations

• The main limitation of this study is the small sample size of 6 participants completing the study.

• There were no adverse incidents experienced by the participants, which supports the future potential to expand this treatment option to larger populations with dementia.

• Future studies should consider increasing the number of aquatic sessions over a longer length of time to see if the benefit of the treatment can be sustained longer than in this study.

• Future research including measures of fitness and function to investigate healthy aging and fitness levels.

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References


