

The role of health care providers in Enhancing Physical Activity Among the Elderly in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This review aimed to synthesize the available evidence on the role of healthcare providers in enhancing physical activity among the elderly in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Physical inactivity is a significant public health concern among older adults, contributing to increased morbidity and mortality. Healthcare providers play a crucial role in promoting physical activity and improving the health and well-being of this population. This review explored the current practices, challenges, and effective strategies employed by healthcare providers in KSA to enhance physical activity levels among the elderly.

Keywords: Physical Activity, Older Adults, Elderly, Physical Inactivity, Health Promotion, Public Health, Healthcare Providers

Introduction

As the global population continues to age, the significance of promoting physical activity and exercise among older individuals has become increasingly evident. Aging is often associated with a decline in physical function, leading to various health challenges and a potential reduction in overall well-being. Considering this, recognizing and addressing the importance of physical activity for older people is not merely a matter of enhancing their quality of life but is also essential for mitigating the impact of age-related health issues [1].

Physical activity and exercise play a pivotal role in maintaining and improving the physical, mental, and social aspects of older individuals' health. Regular engagement in appropriate exercises has been proven to enhance cardiovascular health, maintain muscle strength and flexibility, and reduce the risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease, osteoporosis, and diabetes. Moreover, the positive impact extends beyond physical health, influencing cognitive function and mental well-being, fostering a sense of independence, and improving overall mood [2]. Aging is accompanied by physiological changes that often lead to decreased physical activity among older individuals, contributing to health-related challenges. Numerous studies (Sherrington, et al, 2019) highlight the positive impact of physical activity on the health and well-being of the elderly, emphasizing its role in preventing chronic diseases and improving overall quality of life. However, despite the wealth of evidence supporting the benefits of physical activity for older adults, there remains a noticeable gap in understanding the specific factors that hinder their engagement in regular exercise routines [3].

The existing literature acknowledges the importance of physical activity for the elderly but falls short in providing a comprehensive understanding of the unique barriers and challenges faced by this population, leading to suboptimal levels of engagement. Identifying these obstacles is crucial for developing targeted interventions that address the specific needs and preferences of older individuals, ultimately promoting sustained and meaningful physical activity [4]. Physical inactivity is a major public health concern globally, and its prevalence

increases significantly among older adults. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), a rapidly aging population and changing lifestyles contribute to a growing burden of chronic diseases associated with physical inactivity. Healthcare providers play a crucial role in promoting physical activity and improving the health and well-being of older adults.

This systematic review aims to synthesize the available evidence on the role of healthcare providers in enhancing physical activity among the elderly in KSA. It examined the current practices, challenges, and effective strategies employed by healthcare providers to promote physical activity in this population.

Literature review

Physical activity plays a crucial role in promoting health and well-being across the lifespan. Among older adults, maintaining an active lifestyle is particularly vital for preserving independence, preventing chronic diseases, and enhancing overall quality of life. However, despite its numerous benefits, many elderly individuals struggle to engage in sufficient physical activity [2].

Previous research in this area has primarily focused on specific aspects of physical activity among older adults, such as falls prevention, acute care rehabilitation, and managing chronic health conditions. While these studies provide valuable insights into clinical practice, they often adopt a narrow perspective that may not fully address the broader challenge of enhancing physical activity levels among older populations. In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the need for interventions that promote physical activity on a population-wide scale among older adults. While some studies have explored structured exercise programs, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness of broader approaches to increasing physical activity and delivering tailored interventions for older adults [5]. This literature review proposes to address this gap by examining existing evidence related to strategies and interventions designed to enhance physical activity among the elderly. By adopting a comprehensive approach that considers various factors influencing physical activity behavior in older adults, this review seeks to provide insights that can inform the development of effective public health interventions and programs tailored to the needs of this population.

Globally, the population is ageing, and the World Health Organization (WHO) predicts that, by 2050, the population aged 60 years or more will double, whilst those aged 80 years or more will number 400 million people [6]. Previous examinations of physical activity literature for older adults have predominantly concentrated on falls prevention, acute care rehabilitation, and managing specific health conditions. While these condition-focused analyses are valuable for clinical purposes, they may not fully inform interventions aimed at the broader population. Notably, Di Lorito et al. (2020) provided an exception by reviewing structured exercise, yet this approach narrowly targeted exercise rather than encompassing the wider spectrum of physical activity and alternative approaches to promoting it [7]. Although some scoping reviews have addressed physical activity among older adults, none have adopted a public health perspective. Considering our interest in interventions to both increase overall physical activity levels and offer tailored programs and services for older adults, we have opted for a scoping review methodology. This approach allows us to conduct a timely and comprehensive assessment of the entire body of evidence related to physical activity in this population [8].

Ageing is an inevitable process, commonly quantified by chronological age, with individuals aged 65 years or older often referred to as 'elderly'. However, the ageing journey varies greatly among individuals due to genetic factors, lifestyle choices, and overall health status. Consequently, relying solely on chronological age to define the elderly overlooks the significant diversity within this population, particularly regarding their pharmacotherapy needs. Variations in pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics necessitate tailored treatment regimens. Unfortunately, there is a lack of clear definitions that accurately capture the complexities of the elderly population. Using terms like 'elderly' and 'older persons' can lead to inconsistent interpretations, posing challenges in decision-making, especially in healthcare contexts. With the current shift towards patient-centered care, these issues become increasingly pertinent in clinical practice [9].

While efforts have been made to develop models and tools for individualizing therapy, such as pharmacometrics and physiology-based pharmacokinetic modeling, they often fail to account for the full range of age-related factors influencing treatment decisions in older individuals. Many of these tools incorporate age as a primary determinant, overlooking other crucial patient characteristics like comorbidities, polypharmacy, and cognitive and functional impairments [10]. Any strategy or tool aimed at tailoring therapy must adequately address the features of ageing. This includes incorporating a comprehensive understanding of age-related factors into clinical practice guidelines and treatment algorithms, ensuring that therapy is personalized to meet the unique needs of

each older patient. Simply relying on age and genetic variations is insufficient; a holistic approach that considers the multifaceted aspects of ageing is essential for optimizing patient outcomes [11].

Role of Specialist and Nursing Technician in Enhancing Physical Activity Among the Elderly:

The nurse practitioner plays a key role in monitoring and improving physical activity and the function of older adults. Physical activity is an essential component of care management for all older adults, even those who are frail with multimorbidity. All physical activity, no matter how small, has the potential to impact functional independence and quality of life. Partnering with the older adults and caregivers along with interprofessional providers, such as a physical therapist or occupational therapist and community-based resources, facilitates the development of successful goals and plans and the implementation of activities to promote physical activity across the continuum of care [12].

Role of Deputy Radiologist in Enhancing Physical Activity Among the Elderly

A Deputy Radiologist's primary role is to assist a Radiologist in interpreting medical images and performing diagnostic procedures. While their direct involvement in promoting physical activity among the elderly may be limited, they can contribute indirectly in the following ways [13]:

- **Diagnosing conditions that affect physical activity:** By accurately diagnosing musculoskeletal conditions such as arthritis, osteoporosis, and fractures, Deputy Radiologists help ensure that older adults receive appropriate treatment and interventions to maintain or improve their physical function and engage in safe physical activity.
- **Identifying potential risks:** Through imaging studies, Deputy Radiologists can identify potential risks associated with physical activity, such as bone density loss or spinal stenosis, allowing for appropriate precautions and modifications to exercise routines.
- **Communicating with other healthcare providers:** Deputy Radiologists can communicate findings and recommendations to other healthcare providers involved in the patient's care, such as geriatricians, physical therapists, and exercise physiologists, facilitating a coordinated approach to promoting physical activity.
- **Promoting awareness:** By participating in educational programs and raising awareness about the importance of physical activity for older adults, Deputy Radiologists can indirectly contribute to a culture of physical activity within the healthcare community.

Role of Health Administration Specialist in Enhancing Physical Activity Among the Elderly

Health Administration Specialists play a crucial role in enhancing physical activity among the elderly by [14]:

- **Developing and implementing programs:** They can design and oversee programs that promote physical activity among older adults, such as community exercise classes, walking groups, or health fairs.
- **Allocating resources:** They can allocate resources to support physical activity initiatives, such as funding for community centers, parks, and recreational facilities.
- **Collaborating with other stakeholders:** They can collaborate with other healthcare providers, community organizations, and policymakers to create a supportive environment for physical activity among older adults.
- **Advocating for policies:** They can advocate for policies that support physical activity among older adults, such as creating safe walking and biking paths, subsidizing membership to fitness centers, or providing tax incentives for employers who offer on-site fitness programs.
- **Collecting and analyzing data:** They can collect and analyze data on physical activity levels among older adults to identify areas for improvement and track the effectiveness of interventions.
- **Educating the public:** They can educate the public about the importance of physical activity for older adults and the resources available to them.

Role of Midwife Technician in Enhancing Physical Activity Among the Elderly

A Midwife Technician's primary role is to assist midwives in providing care to women during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. Their direct involvement in promoting physical activity among the elderly is limited. However, they can contribute indirectly in the following ways [15]:

- **Promoting healthy lifestyles during pregnancy:** By encouraging pregnant women to maintain a healthy lifestyle, including regular physical activity, Midwife Technicians can help establish lifelong habits of physical activity that can benefit women throughout their lives, including their later years.
- **Educating about the benefits of physical activity:** During prenatal and postnatal care, Midwife Technicians can educate women about the importance of physical activity for their own health and the health of their children. This can help raise awareness about the benefits of physical activity across generations.
- **Identifying potential risks:** Midwife Technicians can identify any potential health conditions or complications during pregnancy that may affect a woman's ability to engage in physical activity later in life. This information can be shared with other healthcare providers involved in women's care to ensure appropriate interventions and support.

While not directly involved in promoting physical activity among the elderly, Midwife Technicians can play an indirect role by promoting healthy lifestyles during pregnancy and raising awareness about the importance of physical activity across generations[15].

Role of Pharmacy Technician in Enhancing Physical Activity Among the Elderly

Pharmacy Technicians play a crucial role in enhancing physical activity among the elderly by [16]:

- **Educating patients about medication side effects:** Pharmacy Technicians can educate patients about the potential side effects of medications that may affect their ability to engage in physical activity. For example, some medications may cause fatigue, dizziness, or muscle weakness, which can make it difficult for older adults to exercise. By being aware of these side effects, patients can work with their healthcare providers to manage them and maintain an active lifestyle.
- **Providing information on medication adherence:** Pharmacy Technicians can help patients understand the importance of taking their medications as prescribed. This is crucial for maintaining overall health and preventing conditions that may limit physical activity.
- **Promoting healthy lifestyle choices:** Pharmacy Technicians can provide patients with information and resources on healthy lifestyle choices, including the importance of physical activity. They can also offer tips on how to incorporate physical activity into daily routines.
- **Collaborating with other healthcare providers:** Pharmacy Technicians can collaborate with other healthcare providers, such as physicians, nurses, and physical therapists, to develop and implement comprehensive plans for promoting physical activity among older adults.

By providing accurate and up-to-date information on medications and promoting healthy lifestyle choices, Pharmacy Technicians can play a valuable role in helping older adults maintain their physical health and well-being.

Conclusion

This review highlights the critical role of healthcare providers in enhancing physical activity among the elderly in KSA. While challenges such as limited resources, cultural factors, and a lack of specialized training exist, several effective strategies can be implemented. These include:

- **Assessment and Counseling:** Healthcare providers should routinely assess physical activity levels, provide personalized exercise recommendations, and counsel patients on the benefits of physical activity.
- **Education and Resources:** Educating patients about the importance of physical activity and providing them with access to resources such as exercise programs and community resources is crucial.
- **Addressing Barriers:** Identifying and addressing barriers to physical activity, such as lack of motivation, access to facilities, and cultural factors, is essential for successful interventions.
- **Interprofessional Collaboration:** Collaboration among healthcare providers, including physicians, nurses, physical therapists, and occupational therapists, is vital for developing and implementing comprehensive physical activity programs.
- **Policy and Program Development:** The development and implementation of national policies and programs to promote physical activity among older adults in KSA is crucial.

This review emphasizes the need for further research to investigate the effectiveness of different strategies for promoting physical activity among older adults in KSA and to address the unique challenges faced by this

population. By implementing evidence-based strategies and addressing the identified challenges, healthcare providers can significantly improve the health and well-being of older adults in the Kingdom.

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