Peer Coaching to Promote Supervised Fitness Training for Older Veterans with Psychotic Disorders

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GSA 2018
11/16/18
Disclosures

- Anjana Muralidharan, Ph.D.
  - I have nothing to disclose.

The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the VA, the U.S. government, or other affiliated institutions.
Outline

- Why older adults with psychotic disorders?
- Why supervised fitness training?
- Who are peer coaches?
- Development of the intervention
- Results from an ongoing small open trial
Psychotic Disorders and Medical Comorbidity

My definition of psychotic disorders: schizophrenia spectrum disorders, bipolar I disorder, major depression with psychotic features

Individuals with psychotic disorders:

- Have higher rates of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, respiratory disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, and other medical conditions

  SAMHSA, 2011

- Die, on average, ~10 years younger than the general US population, mostly due to medical illness such as cardiovascular disease

  Walker et al., 2015
Psychotic Disorders and Aging

As they age, individuals with psychotic disorders may experience:

- Increased rates of **life-threatening medical conditions** such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases increase
  - Kilbourne et al., 2005

- Persistent **psychiatric symptoms**
  - Cohen et al., 2014

- Persistent **psychosocial impairment** and poor social support
  - Meesters et al., 2010

- For some, age-related **cognitive decline and dementia**
  - Thompson et al., 2013
Early Institutionalization

Individuals with psychotic disorders are at greater risk for early institutionalization:

- Nearly four times the risk for early (i.e., in their forties/fifties) institutionalization in long-term care, when compared to the general population
  - Andrews et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2006

- Three-fifths of individuals with schizophrenia admitted to nursing homes are younger than 65
  - Aschbrenner et al., 2015
Supervised Fitness Training

Supervised fitness training:
Completing an prescribed set of exercises under the supervision of exercise physiologists

- Physical activity, mobility function, and fitness are powerful predictors of long-term outcomes among older adults
- Participation in a VA supervised fitness training program for older Veterans, Gerofit, has significant long-term impacts on mobility function, functional impairment, and all-cause mortality
- Potential to impact outcomes across domains of functioning

Morey et al., 2002
VA Rehabilitation Research and Development Service
Career Development Award

- Research Goal
  Develop and test a peer coaching intervention to promote participation in supervised fitness training for older Veterans with psychotic disorders

- Training Goal
  Develop expertise at the intersection of aging and psychotic disorders
Who are the peer coaches?

- Certified Peer Support Specialists
  - Providers who are trained to use their recovery story to support the mental health recovery of others
  - Have their own lived experience of mental illness
  - In the VA, CPSS are Veterans
  - In my study, the Peer Specialists are older than 50
CDA Research Aims

- **Aim 1:** Develop a group-based peer coaching intervention to promote participant in a supervised fitness training program
  - Use an iterative process of developing materials and obtaining feedback on drafts from two panels of experts
    - **Expert Advisory Panel:** multidisciplinary panel of expert researchers, clinicians, and a Peer Specialist
    - **Veterans Advisory Panel:** panel of Veterans with mental illness – a source of consultation and advice at our research center
CDA Research Aims

- **Aim 2:** Conduct an open trial of the intervention with older Veterans with psychotic disorders (ages 50 and up; n=6)

- **Aim 3:** Conduct a small randomized controlled trial of the intervention with older Veterans with psychotic disorders (ages 50 and up; n=6)
Veterans Advisory Panel
Focus Groups

- Between 5-9 Veterans with mental health conditions enrolled in VA services
- 6 males, 3 females
- Majority were over 50 years old (1 in 40’s, 1 did not disclose)
- Five 90-minute meetings, approximately every two months, over 1 year
- Different focus in each session
- Discussion recorded in detailed notes
Veterans Advisory Panel
Focus Groups

- Session 1: What Helps Veterans Get and Stay Active?
- Session 2: Initial Engagement
- Session 3: Overcoming Barriers
- Session 4: Connecting with Resources
- Session 5: Feedback on Overall Intervention
Focus Group Themes

- Finding the Internal Motivation in Each Person
- Exercise as a Central Tool for Recovery
- Power in Numbers
- Making Exercise a Part of Daily Life
- Encouragement Plus Accountability
Peer Education on Exercise for Recovery (PEER)

**Gym Access Throughout the Program**

A state-of-the-art gym facility and highly trained exercise experts will help you jumpstart your fitness! You will have access to the Senior Exercise Rehabilitation Center (SERC), the gym on the first floor of the Annex building.

Exercise experts will be there to help you use the machines and answer your questions. The exercise experts will provide you a set of recommended exercises based on your fitness and strength levels. These recommendations will change as you progress and get stronger and more fit.

**Phase 1: Get active in the gym!**

*Weeks 1 to 12*

**Engagement Session – Week 1**
Meet your peer coach!

**Group Sessions - Once a week for 12 weeks**
Meet with your peer coach and other Veterans! Share your goals, support one other, work out together!

Work out in the gym as much as you like! Build your confidence!

**Phase 2: Get active in your life!**

*Weeks 13 to 24*

**Maintenance Session – Week 13**
A one-on-one with your peer coach. Plan how you stay active in the gym, and start thinking about how to get active outside the gym!

**Peer Coaching Calls – Once a week for 12 weeks**
Check in by phone with your peer coach, on your gym attendance and community physical activity goals.

Keep working out in the gym AND start getting active in your community!

End of the Program! Take it on the Road!

STAY ACTIVE in your life!

IMPROVE your health and well-being!

DO MORE of what you care about!
Engagement Session

Benefits of Exercise
Circle the benefits that are most important to you!

Psychological
- Reduced depression
- Reduced anxiety
- Less stress
- Better mood

Cerebrovascular
- Decreased risk of stroke

Respiratory
- Improved respiratory function
- Stronger lungs
- Increased oxygen uptake

Metabolism
- Reduce liver disease
- Lose weight
- Reduce or help to control Type II diabetes

Digestion
- Improved digestion
- Decreased constipation

Mobility
- Improved coordination, balance, flexibility
- Reduced risk of falls, fractures
- Improved mobility

Cognition
- Improved concentration
- Better memory

Sleep/Wake
- Better sleep
- More energy

Cardiovascular
- Improved circulation
- Strengthens heart
- Lowers blood pressure
- Lower risk of heart disease and heart attack

Pain management
- Reduce joint pain
- Reduce pain due to nerve damage

Muscular
- Increased muscle strength
- Increased muscle mass
- Reduce muscle stiffness
# Exercising Safely with Pain

- Pain is the body’s way of warning us something could be wrong
- Remember to listen to your body when you are active
- It is normal to feel some soreness when beginning a new exercise routine
- Learn to distinguish between different types of pain!

## Types of Pain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soreness</th>
<th>Acute Pain due to Injury</th>
<th>Chronic Pain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dull, achy feeling in muscles</td>
<td>Pain that begins suddenly</td>
<td>Any pain that lasts 3 to 6 months or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes – a new or more difficult workout routine</td>
<td>Sharp, stabbing pain</td>
<td>Causes – past injuries or surgeries, nerve damage, chronic health conditions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Starts within a day or two of exercise</td>
<td>Causes – can occur due to injury in muscles, joints, or nerves</td>
<td>Can interfere with life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sign that muscles are getting stronger!</td>
<td>May require medical attention</td>
<td>Can be managed with active coping strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually goes away within a few days</td>
<td>Goes away when body heals</td>
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**If I have pain is it safe for me to be active?**

**YES** – in most cases, in spite of having medical problems and pain, most people CAN do some physical activity.

**SAFETY TIPS**

- Practicing exercise safety is the best way to prevent injury
Prizes!

- Water bottle for your first group
- PEER T-shirt for your fourth group
- Gold star for every goal achieved
- Every three gold stars = a small prize!
  - Keychains, sunscreen, chapsticks, lanyards, etc.
Aim 2 Recruitment

- Inclusion criteria
  - Chart diagnosis of schizophrenia spectrum disorders, bipolar I disorder, or major depression with psychotic features
  - Age 50 and up
  - Participation in mental health services at the study site
  - Sufficient clinical stability to participate as deemed by a mental health treatment provider
  - Sufficient medical stability as deemed by a medical provider
Aim 2 Recruitment

- Exclusion criteria
  - Current participation in a supervised exercise program
  - Medical conditions which would preclude exercise participation
  - Inability to complete the Graded Exercise Treadmill Test
  - Positive cardiac stress test, unless symptomatic coronary artery disease is ruled out by imaging studies
  - Lack of capacity to consent
Aim 2 Screening

- Chart review/phone screen
- Informed consent
- History and physical with a medical provider
- Graded Exercise Treadmill Test
  - Screens for cardiac abnormalities which would preclude participation
  - Establishes approximate peak aerobic capacity to inform exercise prescription
Aim 2 Procedures

Once eligible:

- Scheduled for one-on-one engagement session with Peer Coach
- Scheduled for gym orientation session with exercise physiologist
- Granted 24 weeks of access to the gym facility during opening hours

Intensive phase:

- Attend PEER group sessions, once/week for 12 weeks
- Set weekly goals with peer coach regarding gym attendance
- In-person qualitative interview at 12 weeks (60-90 minutes)
Aim 2 Procedures

- **Maintenance phase**
  - Weekly coaching calls with peer coach to set goals regarding gym attendance and community physical activity
  - In-person or phone-based qualitative interview at 24 weeks (30-45 minutes)
Participant Stories
Wayne

“I said whatever will help me out mentally and physically because I was becoming a couch potato and that’s not good for your mental health.”

- 56, divorced
- Lives alone, section 8 housing
- Pleasant, kind, reliable, well-spoken
- Schizophrenia
  - Symptoms stabilized with long-acting injectable AP

### Attendance

<table>
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<tr>
<th>GYM</th>
<th>GROUP</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Exercised twice a week for the first 12 weeks</td>
<td>Attended every group session</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Outcomes

- **3 weeks** Feeling more confident – inquired about and obtained employment (where he stays active!)
- **12 weeks** stopped attending gym, now working 6 days/week
- Plans to join a gym with new income
- More active, better sleep, cutting back on smoking, improved diet
Joe

“Like the program said, a few exercises to use the physical activity to help work out my...mental problems. It don’t cure it, it don’t solve it but it help me deal with them better.”

60, divorced
Lives alone, senior housing
Positive, optimistic, energetic, extremely enthusiastic
Schizophrenia
Symptoms stabilized on AP medications

Outcomes
If you ask Joe, this program got rid of his arthritis
Helps him cope with his mental illness better
Lost 5 pounds
Provided source of social support, encouragement, and motivation to keep going
Feels he has more energy
Something positive to do to start the day—used to being up early after military service

Attendance

GYM
Exercised twice a week for the entire study (24 weeks)

GROUP
Attended every group session
Dave

“I mean this program has been heaven sent for me because I -- I was really at a low, low point in my -- in my life and I was very, very depressed, but since I’ve been working out just the last 12 weeks, I feel much better about myself.”

- 59, single
- Lives alone
- Soft-spoken, gentle, has 11 grandchildren
- MDD w/ Psychotic Features
  - Severe depression
  - Managing with medications, psychotherapy & case management

**Outcomes**
- HUGE behavioral activation effect—participating, making it through, and getting stronger has boosted his mood and confidence
- Change in affect from depressed to euthymic
- Feeling hopeful for the future

**Attendance**
- Isolated-wants to engage more socially
- Before the study, was struggling with chronic depression and chronic passive suicidality

**GYM**
- Exercised 3x a week, every week so far
- Our best gym attender

**GROUP**
- Consistently attended group on a 4th day, each week

“...I was very suicidal, depressed, not coming out of the house. When I did come out the house, I didn’t went nowhere, maybe just to the corner store and back to the house, so like I said, this here -- this here has been a real -- I keep saying this has been a blessing for me, and it pulled me out of the hole I was in, and I was in a deep hole... A very deep hole... And, it gave me my life back.”
“I’m just happy I had the time, enjoyed to come into this program and be a part of the study. I’m glad, and if I can be a shining light to somebody else because somebody else who come in this program like maybe -- you all might say, well, we had a person in here a while back ago named [Dave]. He did this. He was -- he was depressed, and he was down. He was suicidal, but yet, he came in and he worked the whole program and it was beneficial for him, you know. The first couple of weeks was hard for him, but he got into a pattern and he stayed there, and he stayed positive. He got positive, stayed in that positive mood, and he finished the program, and his life is better -- better than what it was before he started. That’s what I want you all to be able to say.”
“You know, I’m not going to forget what I have learned, and what I have known these last couple of months... The positivity... I’m gonna keep that going. I’m gonna keep the positive thinking, the food aspect, keep an eye on what I do -- put in my body... And, knowing -- knowing some of the warning signs when I -- warning signs of being depressed, keep busy. Always -- like I said, positive is the key word today, positive. Stay positive, think positive, always be positive. That’s it.”
“I used to get cramps in my legs and they were terrible. Sometimes I’ll get a little cramp every now and then in my leg or my foot, but it’s subsided now since I been going down there to the gym.”

### Attendance
- **GYM**
  - Once a week, every week so far
- **GROUP**
  - Attended 11 of 12

### Outcomes
- Enjoys the program
- Noticed some physical health benefits
- Liked having something to do
- He learned more about his health

### Ed
- 71 years old
- Widowed
- Lives alone in his own apartment
- Very social, always joking around, an artist and painter
- Schizoaffective disorder
  - On injectable APs
  - Followed by MHICM program

Transportation was a barrier to coming more frequently.
"After I started the program I started to get out more. I started to do a little more walking or just walk for sport or something like that. I started building up my strength."

**Dylan**

- 60
- Long-term girlfriend
- Lives in house with partner
- Has a payee
- Quiet, kind, always smiling
- Schizophrenia, Substance use disorder
  - Medication management
  - Substance abuse group

**Attendance**

- **GYM**
  - Once a week, occasionally twice
- **GROUP**
  - Consistently attends each week

**Outcomes**

- Confidence boost—feels like he's achieved something
- Thinking more clearly
- Feels like he is "worth it"
- More willing to do things
Jeff

- 65
- Divorced
- Lives alone
- Soft-spoken, determined
- Schizophrenia with ongoing psychotic symptoms
  - Engaged in multiple programs and services

### Attendance

- **GYM**
  - Once a week, at times inconsistent
- **GROUP**
  - Has attended about half
  - Becoming more consistent over time

### Outcomes

- Ongoing—in intensive phase
- Peer coaches providing a LOT of hands-on structure and support
- When he comes to group, goes down to gym after

- Significant cognitive impairment and ongoing auditory hallucinations
- Difficult to engage—can’t recall days and times of his appointments
Next Steps

- Complete Aim 2 – qualitative interviews
- Use feedback to make changes to the intervention
- Start Aim 3 trial in March or April 2019
The Study Team!

- Kinnera Altluri, B.S.
- Sera Havrilla, M.S., L.G.P.C.
- Tracy Robertson, B.A., C.P.S.S.
- Howard Turner, C.P.S.S.
Acknowledgements

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Alicia Lucksted, Ph.D.
Richard Goldberg, Ph.D.

This project is funded by the VA Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (CDA IKRX002339, Dr. Muralidharan, principal investigator). It is the result of work supported with resources and the use of facilities at the VA Capitol Health Care Network (VISN 5) MIRECC and the Baltimore VA GRECC.
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