Physical Activity within the Residential Aged Care Setting

The World Health Organisation (2012) recommend that older adults should be undertaking at least 2 ½ hours of physical activity a week, and yet residents living within a Residential Aged Care Facility are frequently inactive with a greater rate of function decline then those older adults living within the community (Rolland et al, 2007).

How can I help?

Through my years of working within Residential Aged Care I have realised one very important thing: Placing a beloved relative into a Nursing Home is no different than sending your child off to school. The carer and family members can often feel left out of the Residents care and powerless to help, however it is important for the Residents loved ones to realise that they are very important advocates in the care of their loved one. Just as a parent may help their child with their homework, you have the power to ensure that the Resident stays independent for as long as possible. Ways to ensure that your loved one maintains the recommended amount of physical activity each week include:

- Arrange a meeting with the Diversional Therapists to discuss their activity planner. Diversional Therapists will often include gentle exercise within their monthly activity plan, such as indoor bowls, a walking group, mini golf or a gentle exercise class. Ask for a copy of the activity plan to be forwarded to you each month so that you may discuss physical activities with your loved one and encourage them to participate. It is important to note that support from loved ones has been found to be a key motivator for Residents that attend regular exercise classes (Guerin et al, 2008).
- If possible, try to visit your loved one prior to an exercise class. Some older Residents feel that staff are too busy to take them to classes and therefore do not attend as they do not want to be a burden by asking for assistance (Guerin et al, 2008). By being there you can offer to take your loved one to the class and even stay to offer support.
- If the facility does not offer gentle exercise, put a suggestion in the ‘compliment/complaint’ box. If you are not satisfied with the response from this you may wish to discuss with Management how to lodge an Improvement Log to be discussed at the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Meeting. All Residential
Aged Care Facilities should have CQI meetings to ensure they meet Accreditation Standards. Anything discussed within these meetings should be minuted and appropriate action taken. You should also be notified of the outcome.

- When visiting your loved one suggest taking a walk around the grounds of the Facility. Most Residential Aged Care Facilities have lovely gardens and safe walking paths.
- If you have any skills that may be of use to the facility (for example, you may be a keen tai chi participant, or good at yoga) discuss this with the Diversional Therapist and/or management. You may be able to hold a gentle exercise class when convenient to benefit not only your loved one but others within the facility.
- Some Facilities have Physiotherapists that develop individual gentle exercise programs for each Resident. Ask staff if your loved one has a list of recommended exercises within their notes and request a copy. Spend time on your visits with you loved one helping them to undertake these exercises.
- Ask your loved ones GP to discuss the benefits of regular exercise with them. Many older adults believe that they do not need to exercise as they get older and are unaware of the benefits of exercise (Guerin et al, 2008).

References:


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