

Falls Prevention: Community Exercise Programme; reducing risk of deconditioning, falls and loneliness in elderly patients

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Background & Introduction: Covid 19 has had a devastating effect on the Elderly, resulting in deconditioning, increased falls and loneliness. Tailored exercises can reduce falls in people aged over 65 by 54% and participation in physical activity reduces the risk of hip fractures by 50%, currently costing the NHS £1.7 billion per year in England. This 8 week intervention delivered by trained volunteers in patient's homes, aims to reduce deconditioning, loneliness and the risk, incidence and fear of falling (FOF) amongst elderly patients post-discharge from hospital whilst improving quality of life.

Aims: Proactively reduce patients' risk of falls following discharge home from an acute hospital by:

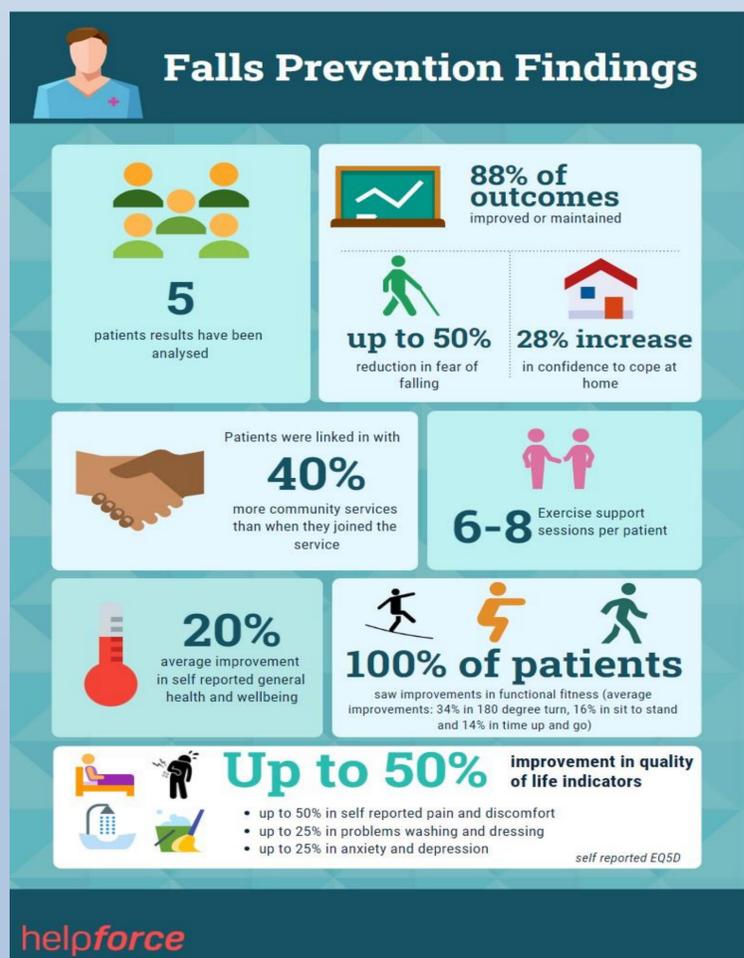
- Reducing fear of falling
- Improved balance, strength and coordination
- Increased social connectivity

Sample Size:

Launched in November 2021 the sample size of patients who completed the 8 week programme was 5 patients. These early findings showcase promising results in a small patient cohort and a second cohort of 5 patients is underway, due to complete Summer 2022. Tests will be repeated once the sample size has increased to prove any statistical significance of these early trends.

Overall Results:

Qualitative and quantitative outcome measures were taken at week 1 and week 8 of the intervention. We are seeing extremely promising results and positive trends.



Method: A gap in service was identified in elderly patients discharged from hospital, at risk of falling and awaiting community physiotherapy. A steering group was set up including acute and community therapists, HelpForce, volunteers and carers to design a collaborative intervention to bridge the gap. At risk patients were identified and referred by ward therapists supported by the hospital volunteering team.

Volunteers visit patients in their homes on a weekly basis for the first 8 weeks following discharge home from hospital, with additional telephone support in weeks 1-4. Volunteers supervise a programme of progressive exercises in patients' homes offering support, encouragement and companionship with additional signposting to appropriate statutory and voluntary services.

Lessons learned and benefits:

- ❑ Sample size remained small due to challenges of identifying eligible patients amongst the population of unwell patients of high acuity.
- ❑ Volunteers are not a free resource – whilst they give their time altruistically, Trusts must invest significant resource into the recruitment, training and management of skilled, community based volunteers
- ❑ There is immense social and functional value in volunteers visiting patients in the home post discharge.
- ❑ Increased collaboration between primary, secondary and tertiary care has improved working relationships, putting the patient first.

“It gave this patient a purpose, with all the benefits that mobilisation around the home and a renewed sense of self-respect and dignity.” Juliet, Ward Physiotherapist

Conclusions:

Targeted exercise at home with skilled volunteers can improve functional fitness and health outcomes in an elderly population at risk of falls when immediately discharged home from hospital. The programme increases patients' connectivity to local voluntary and community sector services. Volunteers' mental health improves by engaging in meaningful service.

Forward Plans:

This service is not an attempt to replace community therapy. Rather, to bridge a gap in service as patients move between hospital and home. Aligned with Helpforce's vision, Back to Health, we see potential to adapt and expand this initiative into Care Homes and areas such as pre-hab and pre assessment with future collaboration and innovation.



“The exercises were enjoyable and there was a good variety. I liked being able to choose and tailor the programme to suit my needs. I chose what I wanted to work on which was lower body and balance, then we found the best exercises for this. The sessions went on for a good amount of time—once a week for 8 weeks felt like enough time to build up confidence. It was nice to be able to see the volunteer... it really boosted my mood and confidence.” Richard, Patient.