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UPMC Moving Through Cancer: A Telehealth Exercise Program for Older Adults Receiving Active Infusion Therapy

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BACKGROUND: Older adults with cancer are up to 2.5 times more likely to have functional decline and 4 times more likely to be frail compared to older adults without a cancer history or cancer survivors. Exercise is one of the most effective and evidence-based strategies to improve several functional and psychological outcomes and demonstrates elevated benefits on disease-free and overall survival for people living with and beyond cancer. However, less than 30% of people living with and beyond cancer meet the recommended exercise guidelines.
PURPOSE: To assess the effect on objective physical function of the UPMC Moving Through Cancer virtual exercise program for older adults receiving infusion therapy.
METHODS: Participants 65 years and older receiving active infusion therapy for any solid tumor were asked to participate in a 12-week synchronous, telehealth exercise program. Participants met virtually with a trainer once a week for 30-minute sessions. Functional assessments (modified Short Physical Performance Battery) were completed before the start of and at the conclusion of the exercise program.
RESULTS: From September 2024 –December 2025, 113 adults have enrolled- 72.65 years old, 39.8% Female, 85.0% Caucasian, and 13.3% are deceased. The highest proportion of diagnoses included Gastrointestinal (23.0%), Lung and Mesothelioma (20.4%), and Genitourinary (15.9%). A total of 53 adults have completed the 12-week program, spending an average of 12.61 weeks in the program. Physical function significantly improved after twelve weeks—score increases were seen in balance (MD= +0.24, SD= 0.73, p= 0.01), chair stands (MD= +0.95, SD= 1.14, p<.001) and total performance (MD= +1.19, SD= 1.54, p<.001).
CONCLUSION: A partially supervised telehealth exercise program elicits a significant change in objective physical function in older adults during active treatment. This institutional program eliminates barriers to exercise participation during treatment and provides a safe, effective way to mitigate functional decline.

Keywords

Telehealth, physical function, older adults, chemotherapy

Conflict of Interest & Ethical Approval

yes

Abstract submitters declaration

yes

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