

Playful Aging: Using a FUNctional Approach to Physical Therapy with Older Adults: A Systematic Review

INTRODUCTION: Geriatric populations are seen in physical therapy practices for a variety of Movement System diagnoses. Functionally appropriate plans of care that include traditional adult interventions are generally prescribed by physical therapists. These interventions may have limited patient engagement, adherence, and reduced patient success. This study explores the use of generation specific and cognitive level appropriate virtual reality, games, dance, and play in physical therapy irrespective of treatment setting or patient diagnosis to facilitate optimal patient outcomes.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this systematic literature review is two-fold: first to evaluate the current research evidence for the use of play interventions for older adults to affect physical therapy outcomes and second, to determine the viability of play as a treatment approach to complement traditional physical therapy interventions for older adults.

METHODS: A systematic review of peer-reviewed literature published after 2000 was performed in EBSCO, PubMed, Google Scholar, and APTA Discovery Service databases using key words older adults, fun, physical therapy, and outcomes.

RESULTS: Initial searched yielded 196 unique articles, and following application of inclusion criteria, 24 articles were selected for review. Of those, 11 articles included electronic games including virtual reality, 6 articles included dance, and 7 articles included general games and play. Evidence of improved functional outcomes in older adults was reported in varying degrees with each type of intervention.

CONCLUSION: The FUNctional Approach to geriatric physical therapy brings increased patient engagement. By incorporating play into treatment sessions with older adults, functional outcomes were achieved likely due to improved adherence to the plan of care. Additional study is needed to further define the degree of change play interventions provide in geriatric physical therapy.

DISCUSSION AND CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS: Physical therapists are capable of creating meaningful targeted interventions that are enjoyable and fun during therapy sessions. Custom treatment plans incorporating play provide holistic, person-centered care. This approach embraces geriatric patients' unique generational interests and cognitive levels for enhanced functional outcomes.

No funding sources were utilized. **Key Words:** older adults, fun, physical therapy, and outcomes.