Chronic Pain in Older Persons

Summary

The Cornell Institute for Translational Research on Aging is exploring barriers that prevent older people with chronic pain from participating in self-management programs.

Issue

Chronic pain (CP) in older persons is a serious problem. CP is a highly prevalent, morbid, and costly disorder associated with a substantial burden of suffering in this age group. Evidence-based treatments for CP in the form of self-management programs have been developed for use in the community and have demonstrated efficacy, but have been underutilized by older pain sufferers. Numerous barriers likely exist at the individual, program, and cultural level that have a negative impact on program utilization and are in need of characterization.

Response

The Cornell Institute for Translational Research on Aging (CITRA) is a collaboration of faculty members from the College of Human Ecology, Weill Cornell Medical College, and the Psychiatric Division of the Cornell Institute for Geriatric Psychiatry in Westchester.

Partnering with key stakeholders in New York City, CITRA researchers are using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach to identify these barriers, develop and pilot test methods to successfully address the barriers, and disseminate products generated from these activities using a broad range of community and academic venues.

Outcome

A grant entitled “Taking Community Action Against Pain” was recently funded by the National Institute for Nursing Research in response to an RFA entitled Community Participation in Research. Partnering with three senior centers in New York City (each serving a distinct race/ethnicity group), the interdisciplinary investigative team will use CBPR methods to answer the following key scientific questions:

1) What are the major barriers to adoption of and adherence to an evidence-based pain-reduction protocol by seniors with chronic pain?

2) How can the pain protocol be adapted using CBPR to better meet the needs of seniors from three distinct race/ethnicity groups including African American, Hispanic American, and non-Hispanic White Americans?

3) What is the effect of using a CBPR-based program versus a conventional chronic pain program on the effectiveness of the pain protocol?
A number of other activities relating to translational research on chronic pain also are underway. CITRA convened a major conference on Chronic Pain and Older Persons, and a follow-up workshop on the topic. This group has formally constituted itself as the New York City Working Group on Persistent Pain in Older Persons and is developing a research and advocacy agenda.

**Contacts**

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