Physical and Psychological Effects of a 12-Session Cancer Rehabilitation Exercise Program

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Background: The positive effects of regular exercise for cancer survivors are becoming increasingly apparent. However, comprehensive examination of the benefits of modest levels of physical activity is somewhat lacking.

Objectives: This study aimed to test the hypothesis that participating in a 12-session exercise program will improve depression, fatigue, aerobic endurance, muscular strength, and quality of life (QOL) in patients with cancer.

Methods: A group of 20 older adult women with a prior cancer diagnosis were evaluated during a 6- to 10-week exercise program that occurred twice weekly. The majority of patients had breast cancer (n = 14), but treatment status varied (11 were currently undergoing treatment, and 9 were post-treatment). Each patient completed initial and exit assessments, which consisted of three physical function tests and three psychosocial questionnaires. Patient charts contained the initial and final assessment scores and personal demographics.

Findings: Analyses of pre- and postprogram data using paired t tests revealed that 12 exercise sessions (each lasting about an hour) significantly improved six-minute walk test, 30-second sit-and-stand test, hand grip strength test (dominant and nondominant hand), and overall QOL scores in patients. As a result, moderate levels of exercise have a beneficial effect in this population.

Key words: cancer rehabilitation; exercise/physical activity; quality of life; fatigue

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