SCI Focus on Fitness Program: Feasibility of implementing adaptive tele-exercise and wellness programming during COVID

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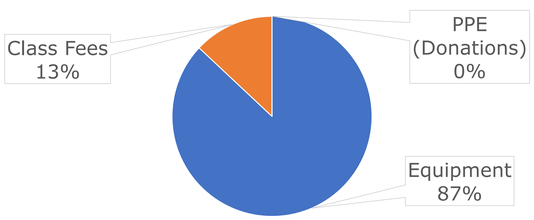
Background

- Leisure-time physical activity (LTPA) in the spinal cord injury (SCI) population results in fewer secondary health conditions, decreased pain, and improved quality of life.
- Approximately 50% of people living with SCI/D report no LTPA.
- Intrinsic barriers: motivation, finances, and transportation
- Extrinsic barriers: accessibility of specialized programs, personal instruction and equipment
- Studies have shown that tele-exercise is highly valued by people living with SCI and helps to overcome reported barriers to participation.

Participant-Reported Barriers to Exercise

- COVID precautions resulting in fitness center closures
- Fear of infection
- Lack of resources (aide assistance, PPE)
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of equipment at home
- Lack of knowledge regarding independent exercise
- Lack of motivation

Program Expenses ($15,000)



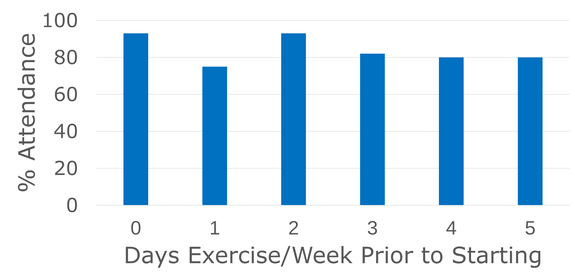
Program Design

- Describes a novel approach to tele-exercise programs
- 6-week virtual program (1 hour/day x 5 days/week)
- Adaptive classes: boxing, cardio, yoga, strengthening, meditation, Zumba
- Cost: $250 per person
- Participants provided with fitness equipment and PPE
- Funded by Craig H. Neilsen Foundation Emergency Relief and Pandemic Support Funds

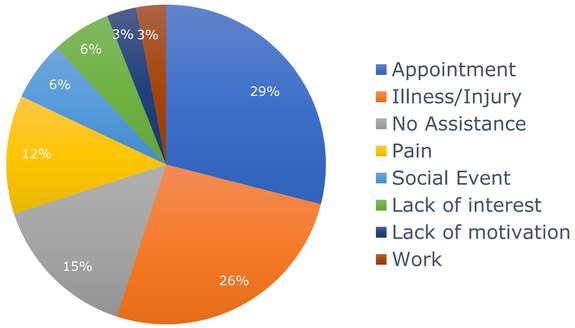
Program Results

- 61 participants completed the program (five 6-week sessions)
- 20 participants (33%) completed the post-survey
- 50% reported exercising 2 days or less prior to starting
- 83.5% attendance rate 5 days/week for 6 weeks
- On post-survey, all participants reported the following:
  - Improved mood
  - Improved mental health
  - Increased confidence in ability to perform home exercise independently

Self-Reported Attendance Rate Based on Exercise Level Prior



Barriers to Attendance



Conclusions

- The institution formed new partnerships with community instructors and continue to collaborate
- Recreational therapy department continues to offer tele-exercise and wellness classes to decrease barriers
- Recommend the development and implementation of tele-exercise programs for the SCI/D population to promote physical activity, mood, and mental health

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