

Evidence-based Programs and Your Practice A Foundation for Value-Based Care Delivery

PART 3

Answers the Question: What do I do if my community does not have access to evidence-based programs?

The AGPT-NCOA Task Force

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In article 1 of this series, “effective clinical-community partnerships,” we set out to answer the question: “What are evidence-based programs (EBPs) and why should I care?” In article 2, we answered the question: “How do I find and refer patients to appropriate EBPs?” and highlighted the critical role of clinical - community partnerships in building a continuum of care to achieve better patient outcomes at a lower cost. This article addresses the question, “What happens if I can’t find these programs near me?” Our aim is to address this question in detail, provide you with decision-making guidance to choose the best available options, and offer strategies to advocate and support the development of opportunities and partnerships in the future. We will discuss partnering with community organizations as well as offering wellness and evidence-based programs in your own clinic.

WHY CAN’T I FIND PROGRAMS?

First, make sure that you have followed all of the recommended steps in Article 2:

- Access the National Council on Aging Website NCOA Center for Healthy Living, <https://www.ncoa.org/healthy-aging/>) to see if organizations in your community offer EBP
- Access The Evidence-Based Leadership Council (<http://www.eblcprograms.org/>) to see if any organization is licensed to offer EBP in your community

- Contact your local AAA and senior center
- Contact your local YMCA
- Contact any other organization in your community that serves seniors (Parks and Recreation, faith-based organizations, etc)

When you have completed these steps, you may find that the organizations serving your community are not currently offering EBPs. Unfortunately, not every town or city has access to EBPs offered by community-based organizations. The effort to nationally disseminate these programs began in 2012, and widespread adoption is still in its infancy. To facilitate dissemination, the Administration for Community Living, the government organization that oversees the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and senior centers, requires that centers offer at least one EBP to qualify for additional Title III-D funds. However, implementing these programs can require significant time and resources, and not all senior centers or AAAs have the infrastructure in place to offer these programs at scale - yet.

OPTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

What actions should you take if you desire effective continuum of care options for your patients, but do not have access to EBPs? We will present 4 options for your consideration. Refer to Table 1 for a summary of each option, including pros and cons. Some of the opportunities involve physical therapist’s

teaching and offering programs, whether as part of clinic offerings or offsite in the community. Before you pursue these opportunities, remember to check your state practice act and your malpractice insurance provider to verify you are able to offer these services.

SilverSneakers®

SilverSneakers is a program that includes access to more than 16,000 gyms and community centers, group fitness classes, and on-demand exercise videos that target the senior population. It is the leading fitness program for older adults in America, provided by many Medicare Advantage health care plans at no extra cost to their members. Numerous research studies have shown the health benefits of SilverSneakers, including lower health care costs,¹ reduced risk of depression,² lower likelihood of hospitalization,³ and fewer activity impairments.⁴ When treating SilverSneakers members, integration of this free fitness program into the patient’s treatment plan can help optimize the effectiveness of physical therapy interventions, and help ensure sustainability of physical therapy outcomes over time.

SilverSneakers Group Exercise Classes⁵

SilverSneakers group exercise classes⁵ are taught by instructors who specialize in senior fitness and who foster a safe environment for senior members. SilverSneakers instructor training includes the physiology of aging, the

Table 1

Program	Summary	Pros	Cons
SilverSneakers	Fitness classes specifically for seniors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16,000 sites across the United States • Free for many Medicare Advantage members • Certified instructors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have limited options for patients who are more frail • Potential variability in teaching and programming
A la carte	Combination of PT-prescribed exercises and appropriate exercise class in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community exercise program supports long-term behavior change • Building partnerships and networks can increase patient referrals • Developing relationships with instructors can help support patient engagement and follow through 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-consuming • No systematic quality control • Multiple instructors - variability in content and intensity • Membership fees
Offering programs where your patients are	Developing and teaching classes at senior centers, assisted-living, etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide quality programming to meet the needs of your patient • Create continuity of care - no need for a “hand-off” • Opportunity to market your services in new venues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-consuming • May not be within scope of practice (state-dependent) • May be difficult to find a willing partner and space
Offering programs in-house	Develop wellness programs available to patients and the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insure patient continues progress • Tailor programs to patient needs • Marketing & diversification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-consuming • Requires significant space and resources

cardiopulmonary system, the nervous system, the musculoskeletal system, exercise recommendations for various chronic conditions, and exercise safety for the aging adult.

SilverSneakers classes are designed for every fitness level and include exercises to improve functional mobility, cognitive health, strength, balance, socialization, and chronic condition management. Progressive and regressive exercise modification options are demonstrated during class to accommodate diverse needs and abilities. Instructor cueing for breath, perceived exertion, and water breaks are required class components.

With regard to the patient at risk for falls, there are multiple SilverSneakers offerings that may complement a skilled physical therapy program and/or the Otago Exercise Program. As always, the best choices should focus on the root cause impairments and risk factors contributing to the patient’s fall risk.

There are a multitude of SilverSneakers class offerings, including:

- SilverSneakers Classic: Increase strength, range of motion and improve activities of daily living
- SilverSneakers Circuit: Low impact choreography alternated with upper-body strength work

- SilverSneakers Yoga: Seated and standing yoga poses designed to increase flexibility, balance, and range of movement
- SilverSneakers Splash: fun, shallow-water exercise class using a signature splash-board to increase strength and endurance
- SilverSneakers Stability®: Improve balance and strength through exercises that strengthen the ankle, knee, and hip joints
- SilverSneakers EnerChi: Easy to learn tai chi and qigong exercises to improve well-being, increase muscular endurance, improve balance recovery, and calm the mind
- SilverSneakers BOOM™ MUSCLE: Athletic-based exercises to improve strength and functional skill
- SilverSneakers BOOM™ MIND: Fusion of yoga and Pilates focusing on core muscles, lower-body strength, and balance
- SilverSneakers BOOM™ MOVE: Dance-inspired workout improves your cardio fitness with easy-to-follow moves

Additional options include:

- SilverSneakers FLEX® exercise classes offered outside the traditional gym

- setting, in parks and recreation centers
- SilverSneakers On-Demand™ exercise videos your patients can do at home and include various options such as cardio and strength training programs, tai chi, and a 12-week Fall Prevention Series
- Access to gyms with weights, pools, cardio-equipment access⁶ (varies by location)

Find SilverSneakers Locations Near You

To find SilverSneakers locations and classes near you, visit SilverSneakers.com and select ‘Locations’ from the menu options. Enter an address to see a list of locations near you. To find more information on amenities and classes offered at each location, click on the location name. If you are interested in observing a SilverSneakers class to determine if it is appropriate for your patient(s), simply contact the location to ask if they allow class observations. Policies vary by location.

Determine if your patient is eligible for SilverSneakers

Your patients with Medicare Advantage insurance plans can check their eligibility for SilverSneakers by visiting

SilverSneakers.com. They simply click on the 'Check Your Eligibility' button and enter the requested information. If they are eligible, they will obtain their 16-digit ID number and can use the location search to find participating locations. Eligible members can visit any participating location and/or class.

A La Carte - Picking and Choosing Programs in Your Community to Supplement the Physical Therapy Plan of Care

Often it is best to consider a combination of programs and activities to fully meet each patient's unique needs, and promote sustainable patient interest and engagement. Consider the patient who needs a strength and balance program for fall prevention, but also needs a general exercise program to achieve and sustain optimal health, in line with current American College of Sports Medicine's physical activity guidelines. In your community there are no specific balance programs available, nor is there access to any of the evidence-based physical activity programs. In this case, the best option is for you to prescribe an evidence-based strength and balance program, like the Otago Exercise Program, and refer your patient to a general exercise program in the local community.

There are several local gyms that market a variety of programs to the senior population. Without designation as an EBP, it can be more challenging to determine the content and goals of the program, the intensity of activity, and the ability of the instructor to tailor exercises for participants. It will require the clinician's time to learn the specific details of these programs, and determine if they are appropriate for the patient's needs. Consider reaching out to the course instructor and observing a class. In some instances, you may be able to participate in the class with your patient as part of his/her skilled physical therapy treatment. Your plan of care will include instructing the patient in appropriate modifications of the exercises and ensuring he or she can perform the exercises independently and safely.

It is important to find the exercise professionals and programs that are an appropriate match for our patients. A

qualified exercise professional (exercise physiologist, personal trainer or group exercise instructor) can be an effective partner by providing the expertise, supervision, and motivation that can help patients continue their progress and maintain a habit of regular physical activity. Registries exist that can assist you with finding a certified exercise professional. The United States Registry of Exercise Professionals® (USREPS) is an internationally recognized registry of exercise professionals in the United States. This is a great resource when starting to locate individuals in your community for future partnerships.

As you explore options in the community, you may find programs offered in a variety of settings in addition to traditional gyms, such as senior centers, churches, and local hospitals. Considering all options in all settings enables you to build a rich network of opportunities to partner and meet the diverse needs of your patient population.

Offering Programs Where Your Clients Are - Senior Centers, Assisted Living Facilities, Senior Housing, Congregate Meal Sites, etc.

As a physical therapist, you can use your knowledge, expertise, and creativity to design and deliver classes and programs that meet identified needs of people in your community. This can be an effective first step to establishing partnerships and building a clinical-community continuum.

Start by determining what the needs are in your practice and your community. Analyze your client population - do your clients have a high prevalence of diabetes? arthritis? falls? Access your local public health department to identify the top chronic diseases and injuries in your community. Once you know the top health issues to address, identify local organizations or businesses who have an interest in partnering. This can be a source of resources such as space, instructors, and clients. Common partners include senior centers, community centers, churches, congregate meal sites, and assisted living facilities.

Identify programs currently offered by these organizations to determine if and how you can provide additional

value. General exercise programs may be available in your community, but they may not address specific health conditions such as osteoporosis, arthritis, or balance. You can partner with the community organization to identify and implement an EBP, or you can design and offer programs that fill a gap, as well as refer patients to support existing programs.

There are multiple ways in which physical therapists can offer programs where our clients are. These best practice strategies often result in a win-win for everyone! One real life success story of employing these practices is at the Seymour Center, a senior center in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The center partnered with a local physical therapist for a balance program. This partnership evolved, and the center ultimately offered office space to the physical therapist for an onsite outpatient clinic. Today there is a thriving outpatient practice at the senior center, and a seamless flow of clients between the different programs and the physical therapy clinic.

OFFERING PROGRAMS IN YOUR PRACTICE

A comprehensive program of physical therapist-designed and supervised functionally-based classes can be the foundation of a successful private practice. Patients often need more support to build upon the gains made in physical therapy. These are the patients discharged with a home exercise program, and who return in a few months because they have not progressed. They are challenged with finding the right exercise program tailored to their needs. By performing a physical therapy wellness assessment, and then placing the patient in the appropriate physical therapy designed class, the program can be tailored specifically to meet each patient's unique needs. This physical therapy wellness model is a proactive approach to patient care. These classes are particularly effective for individuals who are frail, have a complex medical history, and/or are managing multiple chronic conditions.

This model is good for business and good for patients. Group classes bring new clients to the clinic and provide post-

rehabilitation options for established patients. Patrice Hazan experienced the cycle of therapy - achieve goals - discharge - return with her patients. She was motivated to explore different opportunities in her clinic. She created GroupHab to offer small group exercise classes for wellness and prevention to her patients after discharge and to community members. Patrice and others have demonstrated these models help insure clients continue to build upon their progress after physical therapy. The group model is an efficient way to provide continued oversight and support, while using physical therapy knowledge and expertise in innovative ways to promote long term solutions that yield patient success in achieving their goals. Also, not to be overlooked, offering group classes with music and socialization is very fun and rewarding, while at the same time diversifying the practice with cash-based revenue.

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5. Membership includes SilverSneakers instructor-led group fitness classes. Some locations offer members additional classes. Classes vary by location.
6. Participating locations (“PL”) are not owned or operated by Tivity Health, Inc. or its affiliates. Use of PL facilities and amenities is limited to terms and conditions of PL basic membership. Facilities and amenities vary by PL.
7. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2018.

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For Good Measure: A Physical Therapist's Journey to Mobile Application Creator

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Clinicians, within the ever-changing landscape of health care, are required to demonstrate the value of physical therapy now more than ever. Pressures from third-party payers, changing reimbursement rates, and the arrival of value-based payment and merit-based incentives have placed more of an emphasis on a patient's overall outcomes from an episode of care as opposed to the volume of care.¹ Outcome measures are effective tools that can quantify changes in a specific construct, aid in the ability to predict and diagnose, determine the efficacy of treatment, and illustrate improvement to patients, payers, and policy-makers.²⁻⁴

Despite the evidence of outcome measure value, there is a scarcity of

clinical utilization. As a student and then a new graduate, I recognized and personally experienced many of the barriers to implementing outcome measures that are commonly cited in the literature. Barriers include a lack of time, availability, or knowledge of which outcomes measures to select.³ Could a mobile application be a solution that could be used “real time” during patient contact and across multiple settings?

DEVELOPMENT OF A MOBILE APPLICATION

My previous skillset did not include application development or software coding. Therefore, I began researching how to design and create a mobile application. I found websites and videos

that included information on the stages of development and beginner coding tutorials.^{5,6} After identifying the process, I realized that I would need to translate the desired experience into a full storyboard with descriptions of how the application would function and what information would be included. I used my educational background and clinical knowledge to construct the foundation of the application in a way that I believe is most useful for clinicians.

In the design phase, I actively sought to eliminate barriers and provide facilitators for the implementation of outcome measures. In a systematic review, Duncan and Murray identified potential facilitators including “ease of administration, speed of administration,