

Positive Health Benefits

Research Study Findings

The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on the Physical Health, Mental Health, and Social Functioning of Older Adults, by Gene D. Cohen, MD, PhD, Susan Perlstein, MSW, Jeff Chapline, MFA, Jeanne Kelly, MM, Kimberly M. Firth, PhD, and Samuel Simmens, PhD

Overview

Purpose of the Study: to measure the impact of professionally conducted community-based cultural programs on the physical health, mental health, and social activities of individuals aged 65 and older.

Subjects: 300 people (living mostly independently) aged 65 to 100 (average age of 80) from three areas of the US (Brooklyn, NY, Washington, DC and San Francisco, CA). Half were assigned to the intervention group and half to the control group. The intervention group participated in various professionally run activities: writing, poetry, singing, dance, drawing and painting, to name a few. The control group was assessed on the basis of their usual activities. The study ran for three years beginning in 2001.

Assessment Tools: a total of five questionnaires measured three areas of functioning: 1) general assessment of health and problems across the systems of the body, medication usage and health care utilization data; 2) mental health assessment; and 3) social activities assessment, utilizing a detailed inventory of the subject's activities, with attention to the nature, frequency and duration of the activities.

Findings: subjects in the intervention group reported a **higher overall rating of physical health, fewer doctor visits, less medication use, fewer instances of falls, better morale, fewer feelings of loneliness, and a trend toward increased activity** than did the control group.

Implications: the positive impact of participatory art programs for older adults in this study on overall health, doctor visits, medication use, falls, loneliness, morale, and activities reflects important health promotion and prevention effects and a reduction of risk factors driving the need for long-term care. Just 8 cents savings in medication use per person per day would save \$1 billion a year for the Medicare D eligible population.

Study Sponsors: National Endowment for the Arts (lead sponsor), the Center for Mental Health Services of the Dept. of Health and Human Services, the National Institute of Mental Health of the National Institutes of Health, AARP and the National Retired Teachers Association, the Stella & Charles Guttman Foundation and the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM).

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For more information on this study go to: www.gwumc.edu/cahh.

The National Center for Creative Aging was founded in 2001 and is dedicated to fostering an understanding of the vital relationship between creative expression and healthy aging and to developing programs that build on this understanding. Based in Washington, DC, NCCA is a non-profit organization with 2,500 members and is affiliated with The George Washington University.

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