

Case Study 1: Functional Status

1. Describe the evidence to be translated and its relation to a health problem.

- a. What evidence (health-related behavior, test, procedure, treatment, intervention, program) will be translated?

Multiple clinical guidelines from bodies including the Institute of Medicine and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services state that older adults should be assessed for the ability to perform basic activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing, and transferring in and out of a bed or chair. Understanding the ability of older adults to perform these activities – often called “functional status” – is central in improving outcomes in older adults. The project focuses on improving measurement of functional status in older Veterans in primary care settings and use of these data to improve care.

- b. Justify the evidence is ready to be translated (including in the local context).

This guideline recommendation is based on high quality trials which show that in older adults with functional impairments, physical and occupational therapy can improve functioning and prevent nursing home admissions. Functional status assessment is a cornerstone of geriatrics practice. However, the vast majority of older adults are cared for in other primary care settings, where routine measurement and use of functional status is uncommon.

The project therefore focuses on identifying the barriers and facilitators to measurement and use of functional status in VA primary care settings; using these findings to develop and implement protocols to improve measurement and use of functional status data in primary care; and measuring the impact of this implementation process on uptake of functional status assessment and use of these data.

Because the evidence doesn't specifically show that measuring function translates to improved outcomes, this project doesn't fit the strict definition of implementation science. Instead, the project represents a “hybrid” implementation science approach in which we use methods of implementation science to understand how to measure and promote use of functional status information in primary care so it is most likely to be effective.

- c. What health problem will translation of the evidence improve? Justify selection of this health problem as a priority in the setting you plan to work.

Functional impairment is common among older adults and associated with adverse outcomes including high rates of acute care utilization and nursing home admission. Understanding functional status allows clinicians to provide optimal care to older adults. This includes referrals to physical and occupational therapy, which can improve functional and prevent nursing home admission. Understanding function is also essential to delivering patient-centered care, including individualizing cancer screening, evaluating how patients will tolerate interventions, and helping patients and families determine the need for long-term services and supports. In the VA as in other care settings, the population of older adults is growing and with it the need to address high rates of functional impairment and associated adverse outcomes. Hence, the VA is increasingly focusing on programs to improve functioning and quality of life for older Veterans.

2. Identify stakeholder communities and conduct outreach to work with them.
 - a. List key communities/stakeholders involved in translating your evidence
 - b. Consider vested interests of key communities/ stakeholders

This project involves multiple stakeholders. In Aim 1, in which we assess barriers and facilitatorsto improving measurement and use of functional status information in VA settings, we are interviewing patients and caregivers; front-line primary care staff who may assess functional status; physicians who may use functional status information to inform care; information technology and informatics professionals who may encode these data in clinical systems; and health systems leaders who may use these data to understand population health needs.

We will then use data from these multiple stakeholders to inform a multidisciplinary intervention to improve measurement and use of functional status data. We will use a staged approach to test and adapt this intervention in several clinics, again eliciting feedback on the intervention from multiple stakeholders. The evaluation of the impact of the intervention will similarly involve multidisciplinary feedback from stakeholder groups.