



# Senior Update

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on  
Aging

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## – ISSUES IN DEPTH –

### Helping the Homebound Get Up & GO!

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**Our homebound seniors are often forgotten.** Sometimes it feels as though the homebound are invisible to the general public, legislators, and even their families. As service providers, we know of their loneliness and their frustrations. We also know of their warmth, their gratitude, and their sense of humor. Our meals on wheels drivers, senior companions, friendly visitors and ministry services almost uniformly report that their lives are enriched because of their relationships with their frail, homebound seniors.

**Seniors want to remain at home as they become more frail.** An estimated 7 million older adults live at home with chronic disability. Because disability is associated with increased mortality and increased risk of hospitalization or admission to a nursing home, home-based interventions are needed and must be designed to try to reduce and prevent functional decline among seniors and to reduce health care costs.

**Falls and unintentional injuries are the fifth leading cause of mortality and a major cause of morbidity in older adults.** Over 40% of all nursing home admits are either directly or indirectly a result of a fall and are the most common reason given for the need to enter a nursing home.

**Physical activity is an effective strategy for preventing falls in older people.** There is some excellent research that makes it clear that physical activity is critical to remaining strong and “fall resistant”. However, national studies indicate that over 70% or more of older adults do not engage in regular physical activity.

**Little research or funding support is directed towards homebound seniors.** What little research that has been done makes it clear that home-based exercise programming must be fun, inexpensive and managed with limited professional input.



**What is Get UP and GO!????** It was with the above information in mind that the Alameda County Area Agency on Aging partnered with the Alta Bates Summit Tele-Care Program (a wonderful program, call 510-204-4487 for more info), Alta Bates Summit Outpatient Rehabilitation Department, Alameda County EMS, and United Seniors of Oakland and Alameda County to **design and implement a pilot physical activity program for homebound and frail seniors.** We called it **Get UP and GO!** (GUGO), and our clients became our GUGOs.

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This background paper is produced by the *Senior Update* editorial board of the Advisory Commission on Aging, Alameda County Area Agency on Aging, located at 6955 Foothill Boulevard, Suite 300, Oakland, CA 94605. Contact Mary Kaufmann at (510) 577-3531.

**What was the GUGO study design?** We designed a small Random Controlled Trial (RCT). We collected data on everyone, including information on ability to get out of the house, fear of falling, cognitive function, and functional ability. All participants were visited by a physical therapist (PT), assessed for strength and balance, and given an activity "prescription". They were also referred to local resources, and received exercise videos and dynabands. *But only half the clients ALSO received a home visit once a week for twelve weeks from a paraprofessional to support their activity program.*

**Who were our GUGOs?** We enrolled 61 Alta Bates Tele-Care participants. All were frail and homebound. *The average age was 84 years old; 15 people were over 90 years old.* We excluded anyone with dementia, anyone who could not self-feed or self toilet and anyone on hospice.

**Did it make a difference?** *EVERYONE* who received a home visit significantly improved their strength and balance. They went, on average, from 75% at high risk for falling to 40% at high risk for falling, based on the Berg Balance test! And, all clients visited by the physical therapist who followed ANY kind of exercise program improved in strength and balance. Not only that, about a third of clients significantly improved their functional ability using the measures used to determine whether or not someone should enter a nursing home!

Quality of life for study participants who received a home visit improved dramatically.

- 63% reported increased energy;
- 70% reported increased stamina;
- 91% reported increased flexibility;
- 63% reported better mood.

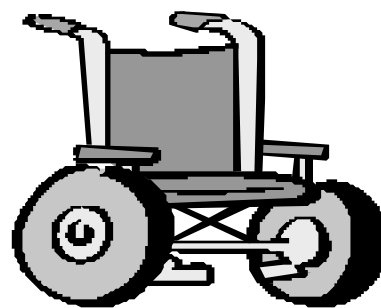
Client satisfaction was greater than 100%! And a recent check-in with study clients indicated that just about all our GUGOs are still exercising!

**And the cost?** The cost of the program was \$400 per participant, which paid for the PT and the home visitor. By comparison, an average cost for a single month in a nursing home is about \$4,000, and the cost of hospitalization for a single fall is \$20,000.

### Can this program be replicated?

Absolutely! We have begun using student nurses at Cal State Hayward to assist our meals on wheels and Friendly Visitor participants in Fremont with weekly visits to help with physical activity support.

There are many ways to support exercise for the homebound. Senior companions, friendly visitors, IHSS care providers and faith-based visitors can all be easily trained to provide exercise support. Call Mary Louise, at 510-577-3538, for more information.



Following are some programs available to homebound seniors.

Call 1-800-510-2020 for more information.

- **Meals on Wheels** programs provide a daily nutritious meal and check-in for a nominal donation request.
- **Senior Companions** are low income senior volunteers who provide peer support to frail seniors in their community.
- **Friendly Visitors** are volunteers who are matched with a frail senior to provide companionship and support.
- **In-Home Support Services** provide funding for various kinds of home care support to low income disabled adults and seniors.
- **Senior Center Without Walls** offers fun and educational classes to homebound seniors.
- **MSSP (Multi-Purpose Senior Services Program)** provides social and health case management to low income seniors eligible for nursing home services.
- **Linkages** provides case management support for older and disabled adults at risk of institutionalization.