Alexander Technique Group Classes Are a Feasible, Cost-Effective, and Promising Intervention for Balance in Older Women

Ramyaa Ravichandra1, Teresa Moote1, Wilson Trusty1, Rajal G. Cohen1, & Monika Gross2
1University of Idaho. 2The Poise Project.

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

Background
Alexander technique (AT) is a non-exercise approach that uses attention and inhibition to change functional patterns, reduce excessive muscular co-contracting, and improve coordination and presence in everyday life.

Purpose
To determine whether AT group classes will provide physical and psychological benefits for care partners of people with Parkinson’s disease.

INTERVENTION

Classes were designed to
❖ Counter care partner isolation
❖ Allow peer-to-peer learning to a group setting
❖ Encourage independent peer interactions post-course
❖ Remove economic barriers through cost effective delivery

Classes were held in non-clinical settings in Ashville and Concord, NC.

DESIGN

90-minute AT group classes were held weekly over 10 weeks. Participants were tested immediately before and after the class series, and 3 months and 6 months after completion. Surveys and evaluation forms were completed by participants at home. Other data were collected on site.

MEASURES

❖ NIH Toolbox: Self-Efficacy
❖ NIH Perceived Stress
❖ Stress and Burden Questionnaire
❖ The Zarit Burden Interview
❖ Mindfulness and Awareness Scale
❖ PROMIS: Self-Efficacy for Managing Emotions
❖ NIH Toolbox: Positive Affect
❖ PROMIS: Emotional Distress & Depression
❖ NIH Toolbox: Fear
❖ PROMIS: Fatigue
❖ PROMIS: Mobility
❖ PROMIS: Pain Interference
❖ Digit Span (forward and backward)
❖ Stroop Test (color word naming)
❖ Mini-BEST – Balance Evaluation Systems Test

RESULTS

The first 4 columns indicate mean scores at the 4 time points. The next 2 columns show sample size and p-values from t-tests comparing pre- and post-course. The last 3 columns show sample sizes, p-values from 1 x 4 ANOVAs, and effect sizes.

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This is the first study of Alexander technique for care partners of people with Parkinson’s disease. The high retention rate and participant enjoyment suggest good feasibility. Participants appreciated the group aspect of the instruction; group classes may offer a path to make Alexander work more widely available.

Benefits from some of the most promising measures (Fear, Zarit Burden, Self-Efficacy for Emotion Management) were not retained at 6 months, suggesting that a longer class series (possibly with occasional refresher sessions) would be beneficial.