

## Implementation of EIM in Health Systems

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The need for physical activity in improving health outcomes is widely known, but not consistently acted upon. One strategy for engaging individuals in greater levels of activity is to refer patients from health settings, typically primary care, to community-based resources and physical activity programs. These physical activity prescription and referral programs can then be customized to impact individuals across the entire lifespan. However, such referrals are particularly important for older adults, who are more likely to participate in community programs if they have been recommended by a provider.



**EnhanceFitness** (EF) is an evidence-based, group physical activity program that helps older adults at all levels of fitness maintain health and function. Taught by certified EF instructors, the 1-hr classes meet three times a week and include cardiovascular endurance training, strength training with cuff weights, and dynamic and static balance, posture, and flexibility exercises. EF has been shown to meet the needs of participants with varying levels of function, strength, and ability through modified exercises that can be performed seated or using support while standing. The settings in which EF is offered are diverse: residential and retirement communities, senior centers, YMCAs and private gyms, and community centers.

In 2014, Dr. Miruna Petrescu-Prahova and her research team at the Health Promotion Research Center at the University of Washington, one of 26 **Prevention Research Centers** funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), began partnering with national EF program licensor Sound Generations and the national YMCA office (Y-USA) in a research project focused on increasing the number of older adults who participate in EF. The goal of the project is to develop a clinical-community linkage where local physical therapists would refer their patients to a nearby YMCA for participation in EF.



The project, named PT-REFER (Physical Therapists – Recommending EnhanceFitness to Expand Reach), began with daily observations of the patient visits at several physical therapy clinics in order to tailor the referral system, and included interviews with practicing PTs. PT-REFER also focuses on providing YMCAs with tools to reach out to physical therapy clinics to create linkages for the referral of older adult patients to the EF classes they offer. Once enrolled in EF, patients

have their health status monitored through three fitness assessment checks conducted every four months as they progress through the program.

While the project is still in its early stages, Dr. Petrescu-Prahova is encouraged and optimistic about the benefits it could have for the older adult community. “Working with the PTs has been very rewarding,” Dr. Petrescu-Prahova expressed. The development of the EF referral system has created a window of opportunity to connect the clinical community (i.e., physical therapists) with the fitness community (i.e., YMCAs, EnhanceFitness) in generating improved health outcomes in the older adult population. The PT-REFER project is showing great potential and the EIM community looks forward to gaining from the lessons learned during this important project!

For more information on the PT-REFER project, contact Dr. Miruna Petrescu-Prahova ([mirunapp@uw.edu](mailto:mirunapp@uw.edu)) at the University of Washington. For more information about the EnhanceFitness program contact Paige Denison ([paiged@soundgenerations.org](mailto:paiged@soundgenerations.org)), Director of EnhanceFitness at Sound Generations.