

CITRA PILOT GRANT PROGRESS REPORT

Self-Neglect in Homebound Elderly

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This study aims to identify factors independently associated with SN, and test the feasibility of the newly developed “Cornell Scale for Self-Neglect,” a detection and severity measure. Collaborating community agencies are the Burden Center for the Aging, Inc., and Search and Care, Inc. The study has been ongoing for several months, and several successes and barriers have become apparent during this time.

To date, 25 potential subjects were approached and 13 enrolled (including 3 controls). Cases resembled controls in terms of gender, marital status, education, and Mini-Mental State Exam scores. However, self-neglecters were younger, reported less co-morbidity, had better vision, but had worse scores in activities of daily living (both basic and instrumental). Self-neglecters also scored worse in mobility, gait, balance, and executive function, and had higher malnutrition risk, worse social networks, and worse judgment. The “Cornell Scale for Self-Neglect” appears to be sensitive so far in detecting cases, which is very encouraging.

There are two main barriers to the flow of the study: 1) The reluctance and high rate of refusals of potential participants to be part of the study (50%). This was expected, and is particular to the nature of the syndrome being studied – a larger pool of potential participants will need to be approached, possibly by adding a third community agency for recruitment. 2) Difficulty in coordinating the schedules of the researcher and caseworkers, in terms of finding a common convenient time for the initial visit, where potential participants are approached and offered participation in the study. This is being resolved by requesting an amendment to the current IRB, to allow initial approach of potential participants after a phone call by the caseworker, without requiring their physical presence in the potential participant’s home (pending approval).

Nevertheless, the findings to date are quite promising: 1) Modifiable factors such as physical functioning, nutrition and social networks of self-neglecters are surfacing as important domains for targeting in future interventions. 2) In addition, it is evident that executive function and judgment warrant a more detailed exploration in a larger study to understand their role in self-neglect. 3) The testing of “The Cornell Scale for Self-Neglect” has been uneventful, and the scale seems to behave as expected. Further analyses of these results in the near future (with a larger N) will provide more information on the significance of the above. This pilot study, even after only a few months, has been instrumental in revealing areas in methodology (particular to the population being studied) that would need improvement in a future larger study, as well as pointing to domains where a future study may need to concentrate. Results will be further clarified upon the completion of the study and more detailed analysis.

Publications or presentations related to this CITRA pilot:

- 1) An abstract of the preliminary results has been submitted to the GSA 2006 Annual Scientific Meeting.
- 2) I was invited by Igal Jellinek, Executive Director of Council of Senior Centers & Services of New York City, Inc., (and CITRA National Advisory Committee), to present the CITRA pilot results at the CSCS-NY conference in 2007.

Grant Proposals related to this CITRA pilot:

- 1) Submitted a pilot project as part of the NIH Roadmap Initiatives – Interdisciplinary Research Consortium (U54) application of Dr. Carmel Bitondo Dyer, to build on her CREST project studying self-neglecters identified by the Texas Adult Protective Services. The pilot’s aims are to test the feasibility of using an instrument she is developing, in a population of self-neglecters identified by community agency workers (in Manhattan) versus APS workers (in Texas).
- 2) Submitted a grant proposal to the Empire Clinical Research Investigator Program 2007, to repeat the current pilot project (studying homebound self-neglecters and testing “The Cornell Scale for Self-Neglect”) in predominantly minority populations (African-American, Hispanic-Latino) from community agencies in Northern Manhattan.
- 3) Currently in the process of writing an NIH K99/R00 proposal, based on the CITRA pilot study (Mentors: Dr. Mark Lachs and Dr. Karl Pillemer).