

## Functional Fitness – Getting our Message across to the public?

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### An idea that will “change the world?”

The theme of Universities Week 2014, was *Ideas for Life* and the relevance of university research and its everyday impact on our lives. A survey commissioned for this event, run by Universities UK with Research Councils UK, the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, asked the general public about the issues that they want university research to address. Thirty per cent said they wanted improved wellbeing in old age and just under a quarter wanted technology that would improve people's quality of life. With this in mind, 20 UK university research projects designed to tackle these issues were highlighted as part of the celebrations, amongst them, the Functional Fitness MOT which was identified as one of the top 20 ideas from UK Universities that “will change the world”. The Functional fitness MOT has been designed at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) in 2011 to highlight the different components of fitness necessary for older people to maintain independent living.

*The Functional Fitness MOT will form part of the AGILE 2015 CPD programme.*

### So what is the Functional Fitness MOT?

The Functional Fitness MOT is a person-centred tool that uses a number of different physical function assessments to give community dwelling older people an idea of how their physical function compares to that of their peers. It was also created to help highlight the importance of physical and mental health and raises awareness of the 2011 UK CMO Physical Activity Guidelines for Older Adults: 65+ years (DoH, 2011). In particular, it is designed to

- highlight the importance of reducing sedentary behavior (Harvey et al, 2013), improving strength and balance and their role in maintaining health and independence in later life

- provide a means of assisting professionals with opportunities to engage older people in a personalised physical function assessment and signposting participants towards local physical activity opportunities
- disseminate the UK CMO Guidelines on Physical Activity to the wide range of professionals who come into contact with older people.

Taking part in a Functional Fitness MOT is an interactive approach to meet the needs of older people by providing

- personal attention to an older person through one-to-one interviewing and discussion
- time to understand the different components of fitness, the barriers, motivators and importantly, to find solutions to initiate behaviour change
- personalised (tailored) information to take away, digest and take action that are based on normal data sets from large studies for comparison to peers (Rikli & Jones, 1999)
- direction towards local follow-up information on activities to do and places to go.

### Starting north of the border

Initiated in June 2011 at the Glasgow Science Festival, and initially piloted in Govan Shopping Centre and supported by GCU physiotherapy students and lecturers, the Functional Fitness MOT was fully launched in August 2012 at the 8th World Congress on Active Ageing, jointly hosted in Glasgow by GCU and the British Heart Foundation National Centre for Physical Activity and Health at Loughborough University (BHFNC).

To date, over 450 Active Ageing professionals including exercise instructors, walk leaders, health promotion leads, sports development officers, age related charities and adult and social care organisations (as well as physiotherapists) across the UK have been involved in a series of professional education events organized by the BHFNC in collaboration with GCU and Later Life Training Ltd. Each training event provides:

- an introduction to functional fitness and the UK CMO Physical Activity Guidelines for Older Adults (65+)
- a practical session where participants undertake their own Functional Fitness MOT
- guidance on interpreting the results and how to encourage the individual to take action
- advice on organising and promoting local Functional Fitness MOT events and activities.

Participants also have access to a full suite of on-line resources for their own future use.

## Assessing the impact - what's been happening?

Participants from the first cohort of open training sessions held in the summer of 2013 took part in an on-line survey to provide feedback on what they had done with their learning since the training event and provide examples of subsequent local activities.

This survey reveals that 93% of respondents shared the information learned during the day either during meetings with other staff members (52%) or during informal conversations (58%). Sixty-two per cent of respondents indicated sharing the information contained in the UK CMO physical activity guidelines:

- 14% used the information to help inform design and content of local promotional materials
- 57% used the information to change content of local programmes or interventions
- 32% included the information in education or training events with other professionals.

Twenty-seven per cent had organised a Functional Fitness MOT event since attending the training and of those who hadn't done so, 81% were still considering this as an option. Although a variety of local venues were used, MOT events were most frequently held in town halls or sports centres.

Fifty per cent of respondents highlighted that they were using the information and MOT activities in other areas of their work, including:

- inclusion of the activities as part of an exercise class
- within a GP referral consultation activity
- on a one-to-one basis with individual patients in primary care
- within university exercise and sports science courses.

A number of respondents also reported an increase in their use of motivational strategies with older people

The Functional Fitness MOT has also been widely used as a community based active ageing engagement event as part of 'Full of Life', the annual Department for Work and Pensions UK Day for Older People (October 1st) in some cases attracting as many as 80 participants.

## Learning from the training programme

Participants have highlighted a number of lessons to consider when planning local events including:

- the need to quality assure local physical activity opportunities
- the need to review quality and content of their own local public facing materials
- the flexibility of the MOT and how it can be used and applied in different situations
- the use of Functional MOT to generate 'a conversation' - a starting point to engage older people in physical activity rather than just a stand-alone test,
- the importance of relating the assessment to the individual and taking time to build a rapport with participants





Some case studies provide some insight into the different ways in which this tool is currently being used in community settings.

**Case study 1.** Aberdeen City Council. Twice a year, Aberdeen City Council and local partners hold open health fairs in the town hall to reach up to 60 older people. The MOT is combined with a wider health check and participants have access to additional, on the spot local services, eg, podiatry, falls prevention, telecare, weight management and healthy eating as well as local physical activity providers.

**Case study 2.** South Oxfordshire. Nine small-scale local Functional Fitness MOT events have been organized in partnership with village based community groups. These events have been designed to reach people in a rural community similarly providing information about local services and involving local providers.

**Case study 3.** Rochdale, Lancashire. Funded by the local commissioning group, Link4Life, a local exercise programme provider use the MOT as the focal point and motivational focus of their 10 week programme with built-in links to other providers as the programme comes to an end.

**Case study 4.** Sheffield Hallam University. Final year students on Sports and Exercise Science courses use the MOT as part of the “Physical Activity Referral Schemes module” but undertake the assessment in age simulation suits (GERT), offering students the opportunity to experience possible impairments that come with ageing eg, opacity of the lens, narrowing of the visual field, joint stiffness, loss of strength and reduced grip ability.

## Using the MOT to enhance physiotherapy approaches

Improving functional fitness and strength and balance are core to the rehabilitation role of the physiotherapist both in community and acute

services. But the concept of functional fitness is relatively unknown amongst the older population. The educational component of the MOT may be seen as one way in which physiotherapists can both raise awareness but also enhance the problematic transition to follow up community services. Furthermore, the MOT programme to-date is succeeding in raising awareness of functional fitness amongst a range of other community based professionals working with older people. Physiotherapists are well positioned to use their expertise in functional fitness to further support and partner with local community based programmes and events. Additional learning for this programme also indicates the potential to develop a refined approach to working with the MOT tool with frailer older people in residential care settings as well as demand for guidance and advice on assessing improvements in physical functional outcomes. The increase in awareness of functional fitness and its future inclusion in local community based programmes will result in the need for support to undertake robust evaluation, something the MOT is not designed to do, but for which there will be a demand.

## Future use - turning practice into evidence

Lothian NHS in Scotland has been successful in applying to the Edinburgh & Lothians Health Foundation for funding to undertake a feasibility study to look at the effect of the Functional Fitness MOT in engaging older patients of a physiotherapy service in increasing levels of physical activity. The study will investigate whether the MOT is appealing to older physiotherapy patients and can be delivered efficiently in a health centre setting. Patient recruitment and retention rates and the extent to which outcome data will be collected and will be measured with a view to planning a future pilot trial of the MOT compared to the usual treatment provided. The study will start in September 2014



and run for ten months. Gathering data on uptake, use and change in behaviour after three months, the study will also involve interviews with staff and older people involved to further understand its potential to change physical activity behaviour amongst older people.

For more details of the Functional Fitness MOT resources visit [www.laterlifetraining.co.uk/functional-fitness-mots-for-awareness-raising](http://www.laterlifetraining.co.uk/functional-fitness-mots-for-awareness-raising).

## References

- Department of Health (2011) Start Active, Stay Active, a report on physical activity for health from the four home countries' Chief Medical Officers. Department of Health, London.
- Harvey, JA, Chastin SFM and Skelton DA (2013) Prevalence of Sedentary Behavior in Older Adults: A Systematic Review. *J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2013, 10(12), 6645-6661;
- Rikli RE and Jones CJ (1999) Functional Fitness normative scores for community dwelling older adults aged 65 – 90. *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*, Vol 7: pp 162-182

### For details of current courses visit

[www.bhfactive.org.uk/older-adults-training-and-events](http://www.bhfactive.org.uk/older-adults-training-and-events)

### For details of materials supporting the UK CMO Guidelines on Physical Activity visit

[www.bhfactive.org.uk/older-adults-guidelines](http://www.bhfactive.org.uk/older-adults-guidelines)

### For further details about sedentary behavior and older people visit

<http://www.gcu.ac.uk/seniorsusp>

### For details of the DWP Full of Life and UK Day for Older People visit

[www.olderpeoplesday.co.uk](http://www.olderpeoplesday.co.uk)

### For details of the Seniors Fitness Test Manual visit

<http://www.humankinetics.com/products/all-products/Senior-Fitness-Test-Manual-2nd-Edition>

### For details of the GERT Age simulation suit, visit

<http://www.age-simulation-suit.com/?gclid=CLCooZybjslCFfHKtAodA2gAyA>

