

Publication

Recruiting hard-to-reach subjects for exercise interventions: a multi-centre and multi-stage approach targeting general practitioners and their community-dwelling and mobility-limited patients

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The general practitioner (GP)'s practice appears to be an ideal venue for recruiting community-dwelling older adults with limited mobility. This study (Current Controlled Trials ISRCTN17727272) aimed at evaluating the recruiting process used for a multi-centre exercise intervention (HOMEfit). Each of six steps resulted in an absolute number of patients (N1-N6). Sex and age (for N4-N6) and reasons for dropping out were assessed. Patient database screening (N1-N3) at 15 GP practices yielded N1 = 5,990 patients aged 70 and above who had visited their GP within the past 6 months, N2 = 5,467 after exclusion of institutionalised patients, N3 = 1,545 patients eligible. Using a pre-defined limitation algorithm in order to conserve the practices' resources resulted in N4 = 1,214 patients (80.3 ± 5.6 years, 68% female), who were then officially invited to the final assessment of eligibility at the GP's practice. N5 = 434 patients (79.5 ± 5.4 years, 69% female) attended the practice screening (n = 13 of whom had not received an official invitation). Finally, N6 = 209 (79.8 ± 5.2 years, 74% female) were randomised after they were judged eligible and had given their written informed consent to participate in the randomised controlled trial (overall recruitment rate: 4.4%). The general strategy of utilising a GP's practice to recruit the target group proved beneficial. The data and experiences presented here can help planners of future exercise-intervention studies.

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