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Stepping Up Counseling and Referral to Effective Physical Activity Interventions for Adults with Osteoarthritis: Comment on White et al., (2023)

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In “Stepping Forward: A Scoping Review of Physical Activity in Osteoarthritis,” White and colleagues¹ aimed to help patients, policymakers, investigators, and healthcare providers (HCPs) better understand how physical activity (PA) is defined and measured, the benefits

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of PA for knee osteoarthritis (KOA), the potential role of PA in the development and/or progression of KOA, and the PA Guidelines for Americans. This correspondence aims to: reinforce the importance of PA for adults with arthritis; clarify definitions for “inactive” and “insufficiently active” from the PA Guidelines for Americans; and supplement White and colleagues’ scoping review by (1) highlighting arthritis-appropriate evidence-based interventions (AAEBIs) for PA and self-management education, and (2) providing resources to facilitate HCP screening, counseling, and referral to evidence-based PA interventions for adults with arthritis.

Because PA is strongly recommended for management of hand, hip, and knee osteoarthritis,² it is a public health priority to increase the proportion of adults with arthritis who receive HCP counseling for PA.³⁻⁴ For overall health, the PA Guidelines for Americans (2nd edition) recommends all older adults (> 65 years), including those with any form of arthritis, engage in at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity (or: 75 minutes vigorous-intensity; or an equivalent combination of moderate- to vigorous-intensity) aerobic PA, and 2 days per week of muscle-strengthening PA. Older adults also need multicomponent PA comprising balance training and aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities.⁵ White and colleagues¹ defined “inactive” individuals as those engaging in 1–149 minutes/week of moderate-to-vigorous PA. However, the PA Guidelines for Americans⁵ uses the following terms: “inactive” to describe individuals doing no (0 min/week) moderate- or vigorous-intensity PA beyond basic movement from daily life activities; and “insufficiently active” to describe individuals doing some moderate- or vigorous-intensity PA (1–149 min/week), but not meeting aerobic PA guidelines. This clarification is important for several reasons. Electronic health records may soon be standardized to assess the number of days/week and minutes/day of moderate-to-vigorous aerobic PA and the number of days/week of strength-based PA. These metrics provide a quick assessment of patients who are inactive, insufficiently active, or meeting guidelines—to help HCPs tailor their counseling and referral accordingly. Additionally, the terms inactive and insufficiently active discourage “all-or-nothing” messaging by acknowledging and positively reinforcing small increases in PA that are likely to produce health benefits, even if persons don’t meet recommendations. Finally, encouraging adults with arthritis to gradually include PA into everyday activities (eg, occupational, transportation, household), and promote leisure-time activities that they enjoy or can safely do at home (eg, walking, gardening) increases confidence, motivation, and success in reducing sedentary behavior and increasing PA.⁵⁻⁸

Adults with arthritis and comorbid chronic diseases have great need for evidence-based PA interventions to help them begin and maintain PA. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) partners with the Osteoarthritis Action Alliance (OAAA) to recognize effective interventions such as AAEBIs for PA and self-management education, demonstrating positive impact on at least 2 arthritis-related health outcomes (eg, pain, balance, function, weight) maintained for at least 3 months post-intervention. Currently, 13 community-based PA AAEBIs are promoted across the United States by state and national partners.⁹ These AAEBIs can be matched with patients’ functional ability, pain, and preferences by considering program length, delivery format (online, in person), level of social interaction (self-directed, group-based), and PA type (walking, combined aerobic and muscle-strengthening, aquatic, tai chi, etc.). Many PA AAEBIs are free/low cost,

many include health education and/or behavior change strategies (eg, goal setting, self-monitoring),^{8,10} and some are offered in multiple languages. While every community may not offer in-person PA AAEBIs, virtual options are available (Table 1 is an OAAA quick reference of AAEBIs). Importantly, PA AAEBIs are effective without requiring PA-tracking wearable monitors, but persons may use these devices based on interest and affordability.

For adults with arthritis who are not ready for PA due to physical limitations or low interest, HCPs can refer such patients to physical therapy or a CDC/OAAA- recognized self-management education intervention that includes information about PA and other chronic disease self-management behaviors (eg, medication adherence, healthy diet). As a person's confidence increases for arthritis self-management, HCPs can follow up at a later appointment to reassess readiness for PA.

In closing, HCPs can play a significant role in helping adults with arthritis assess their PA level, understand the PA Guidelines, understand how PA can benefit overall health and arthritis symptoms, and access arthritis resources and CDC/OAAA-recognized AAEBIs to meet their needs and preferences. Though implementing HCP screening, counseling, and referrals for PA can be challenging, resources can facilitate this process. Tables 1 and 2 include information for implementing standardized PA measures into electronic health records, tips for patient-provider communication, HCP continuing education opportunities, resources for patients, and a list of billing codes for various types of providers.

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Table 1. Healthcare provider (HCP) resources about physical activity (PA) screening, counseling, and referrals for adults with arthritis.

Title	Description	Location	Organization
Health Care Provider Resources	Resources and tips to assess patients' PA levels and refer patients to trusted community professionals.	https://www.exercisemedicine.org/eim-in-action/health-care/resources/	American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM); Exercise is Medicine (EIM)
Health Care Providers' Action Guide	Tips for integrating PA screening, counseling, and referral into patient-provider interactions.	https://www.exercisemedicine.org/assets/page_documents/EIM%20Health%20Care%20Providers%20Action%20Guide%20Clickable%20links.pdf	American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM); Exercise is Medicine (EIM)
Evidence-Based Community Programs: Physical Activity Programs at a Glance	Decision aid to help patients decide which arthritis-appropriate evidence-based interventions (AAEBIs) fit their needs.	https://www.apta.org/contentassets/8a17aa5533744a94aad3aa1f64006f5f/arthritis-programs-decision-aid.pdf	American Physical Therapy Association (APTA)
Active People, Healthy Nation SM	A national initiative to get 27 million more people physically active by 2027—by collaborating across multiple sectors, including healthcare, to increase PA inclusive of all ages and abilities, race/ethnicity, sex or sexual identity, income, and place of residence (eg, urban, suburban, or rural).	https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/activepeoplehealthnation/about-active-people-healthy-nation.html	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Increasing Physical Activity Among Adults with Disabilities	Resources for HCPs outlining how to increase PA among adults with disabilities.	https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pa.html	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
HL7/FHIR: Physical Activity Implementation Guide	Implementation guide standardizing the electronic health record interoperability expectations for measuring PA.	https://hl7.org/fhir/us/physical-activity/2023may/measures.html	HL7 International
National Physical Activity Plan	Plan describing PA policies and programs that can be implemented across sectors, including healthcare.	https://paamovewithus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/National-PA-Plan.pdf	National Physical Activity Plan Alliance (NPAPA)
A National Public Health Agenda for Osteoarthritis: 2020 Update	Web content outlining the role of healthcare providers and systems in assessment, counseling, and referral to PA programs.	https://oaaction.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/623/2020/05/OA-Agenda-Final_04302020.pdf	Osteoarthritis Action Alliance (OAAA)
Arthritis-Appropriate, Evidence-Based Interventions (AAEBI)	Quick reference table describing characteristics of recognized AAEBIs (updated annually).	https://oaaction.unc.edu/aaebi/	Osteoarthritis Action Alliance (OAAA)
Engaging Patients in OA Management Strategies	Brief HCP guide to successfully engage patients in OA management. Includes guidance on motivational interviewing, action planning, PA as a vital sign, and the 5 A's.	https://oaaction.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/623/2019/08/Engaging-Patients-in-OA-Management-Strategies-final.pdf	Osteoarthritis Action Alliance (OAAA)

Title	Description	Location	Organization
OA Care Tools: American College of Rheumatology Guidelines infographic	Infographic interpreting 2019 American College of Rheumatology (ACR) guidelines for management of hand, hip, and knee OA.	https://oaaction.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/623/2022/01/OAAA_1-Clinical-Management-INFOGRAPHIC_d03.pdf	Osteoarthritis Action Alliance (OAAA)
OA Care Tools: Exercise Rx for Arthritis	Quick guidance to help patients with OA create a joint-friendly PA program (pair with "Getting Started with PA Worksheet" for patients; Table 2).	https://oaaction.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/623/2022/01/OAAA_12_RX_for_activity_d05.pdf	Osteoarthritis Action Alliance (OAAA)
Physical Activity Related Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) Codes	Coding and billing tips.	https://paamovewithus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/PAA-Physical-Activity-CPT-Codes-Nov-2020-AMA-Approved-Final.pdf	Physical Activity Alliance (PAA)
Physical Activity Guidelines Midcourse Report: Implementation Strategies for Older Adults	Guidelines describing successful ways to promote PA among older adults.	https://health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/physical-activity-guidelines/current-guidelines/midcourse-report	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
Lifestyle Management Programs for Arthritis: Test Your Knowledge on Evidence-Based Interventions	Web-based continuing education activity to self-assess learning needs for arthritis-appropriate evidence-based interventions (free credit through 11/28/2023).	https://www.medscape.org/viewarticle/983780	WebMD, LLC

Table 2.

Free/low-cost resources health care providers (HCPs) can share with adults with arthritis to support physical activity (PA).

Title	Description	Location	Organization
Being Active When You Have Osteoarthritis	Educational and action planning handouts for adults with arthritis. Available in English and Spanish.	https://www.exercisemedicine.org/eim-in-action/health-care/resources/rx-for-health-series/	American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM); Exercise is Medicine (EIM)
Being Active When Frail			
Being Active as We Get Older			
Sit Less. Move More.			
Arthritis: Find a Community-based Physical Activity Program	Website with links to help adults with arthritis choose and locate arthritis-appropriate evidence-based interventions (AAEBIs).	https://www.choosept.com/health-tips/arthritis-find-community-based-physical-activity-program	American Physical Therapy Association (APTA)
Walk with Ease Self-Directed Guidebook	Easy-to-read book with information and interactive activities to help adults with arthritis begin a walking program. Can be paired with the Walk With Ease E-Portal (below).	https://www.afstore.org/	Arthritis Foundation
Physical Activity for Arthritis	Website providing resources and guidance on PA for persons with arthritis.	https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/basics/physical-activity/index.html	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Increasing Physical Activity Among Adults with Disabilities	Website providing resources for patients and providers, to increase PA among adults with disabilities.	https://www.cdc.gov/ncebd/dd/disabilityandhealth/pa.html	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Move Your Way Communications Campaign	Free federal tools, videos, and fact sheets in English and Spanish for HCPs and consumers, featuring actionable strategies to increase PA.	https://health.gov/moveyourway	Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP)
Getting Started with PA for Arthritis	Interactive worksheet to help patients with osteoarthritis start a PA plan (pair with "Exercise Rx for Arthritis" provider guide, Table 1).	https://oaaction.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/623/2022/01/OAAA_13_Phys-Activity-Worksheet_d05.pdf	Osteoarthritis Action Alliance (OAAA)
Walk with Ease E-Portal	Website portal for adults with arthritis, explaining how to enroll in Walk With Ease.	https://startwalkwithease.org/	Osteoarthritis Action Alliance (OAAA)