The First Intervention Study in Elder Self-Neglect: A Randomized Clinical Trial to Improve Vitamin D Levels

Jason Burnett, Ann Hochschild, Scott M. Smith, Pam Diamond, Angela Stotts and Carmel B. Dyer

**Background:** Despite high mortality rates, elder self-neglect is characterized by refusal of medical and social interventions. To date there have been no tested clinical interventions in elders who self-neglect. Previous research from the TEAM Institute has shown significantly low vitamin D levels in this population. This study aimed to determine the feasibility of a clinical intervention. Replacement of vitamin D was chosen because of its ease of administration and favorable safety profile. **Methods:** A randomized clinical trial using directly observed therapy of vitamin D was conducted using 50 elders, >65 years of age, with Adult Protective Services (APS) validated self-neglect. A staggered intervention with waiting controls was used to maximize statistical power. One-third (n=17) of the group was administered 50,000 IU vitamin D2 (ergocalciferol) monthly and the remainder (n=33) were administered 400 IU monthly. Serum 25-OH vitamin D was assessed at baseline and 5-months. **Results:** 69% agreed to participate in the study and of those n=40 (80%) remained at 5-months. At baseline, 12% (n=7) were deficient in vitamin D (<30nmol/L) and approximately 38% (n=22) had inadequate vitamin D levels (<50nmol/L). The baseline 25-OH vitamin D level was 59 nmol/L ±25 (mean ± SD), and increased significantly to 72nmol/L ±21 nmol/L at 5-months. **Conclusion:** These data are the first to provide evidence that clinical interventions are feasible in elders who self-neglect. The increase in vitamin D levels confirmed that the study personnel were able to successfully intervene community-dwelling elders with self-neglect. This study sets the precedent for future intervention and prevention studies.