

Oakland University expands physical therapy study with Health Innovation Grant funds

An Oakland University study on the effects of preventative, home-based physical therapy on senior citizens has been selected to receive a \$23,300 Health Innovation Grant by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS).

The university is also providing an in-kind match of \$10,418.85 for the project.

“It’s very exciting,” said Dr. Chris **Wilson**, an assistant professor of physical therapy at Oakland University. “In terms of the health and wellness of senior citizens, it’s been such a neglected area. So for us to know that other people in the state of Michigan share our vision, it gives us a confidence boost to keep going.”

Oakland was the only university among 33 Michigan-based organizations and institutions to receive funding via the 2017 Health Innovation Grant, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services [website](#).

“One of the requirements of a state of Michigan Health Innovation Grant is that you have a project that could be expanded to include the rest of the state down the road,” said Dr. Sara **Arena**, an assistant professor of physical therapy at Oakland University. “As part of getting this grant, we had to include in our application how it could be expanded, so that would be our ultimate goal.”

As part of the study, Drs. Wilson and Arena worked with Karen Adcock, director of Senior Services for the City of Auburn Hills and Debra Colling, the health and wellness coordinator and community liaison for Senior Services, to develop a program to help optimize the physical health and fitness of senior citizens who are at future risk for physical decline.

The project, which was initially funded via a \$4,500 Prevention Research Grant provided by the university’s School of Health Sciences, enrolled five participants in the fall of 2016.

“It’s been a phenomenal experience,” Adcock said. “With our city’s goal of enhancing economic and age-friendly community initiatives, it fits right in. We’re very excited about the future.”

According to Arena, the grant from the MDHHS will allow the study to expand to include 30 additional participants, who will be selected based on referrals from the **Auburn Hills Senior Services Department**.

“Some of the long-term benefits to the participants in the study include improved health, more confidence and decreased risk of hospitalization and disease,” Wilson said.

“In addition, long-term benefits to the healthcare system and communities include less demand and strain on current healthcare and advanced senior care infrastructure.”



Dr. Chris Wilson, an assistant professor of physical therapy at Oakland University practices balance exercises with a volunteer while Debra Colling, the health and wellness coordinator and community liaison for the City of Auburn Hills' Senior Services Department, looks on.



Dr. Sara Arena, an assistant professor of physical therapy at Oakland University, demonstrates how to use a blood pressure cuff on a volunteer while Debra Colling, health and wellness coordinator and community liaison for Auburn Hills Senior Services, looks on.

In order to qualify for the program, participants must be 65 or older, reside in Auburn Hills, and must not have had any serious recent medical history or have recently participated in physical therapy.

Qualifying participants will receive six free physical therapist visits in their home for evaluation and an individualized health and exercise program.

“Participants will be educated on topics related to health improvement, including safe exercise, balance, home safety, smoking cessation, optimal nutrition habits, as well as increasing their knowledge of currently available City of Auburn Hills Senior Center community resources,” Wilson said.

The project will be administered by licensed physical therapists.

“As physical therapists, we’ve seen patients who didn’t have the resources they needed, or the continuity of care,” Wilson said. “The outcome isn’t great. So just knowing we can do something to change that, through our program, makes a big difference. We can keep someone out of the hospital or keep them from breaking a hip, and that’s a great impact.”

For more information about the program, contact Karen Adcock or Debra Colling at (248) 370-9353.