

Home-based health promotion for older people with mild frailty: the HomeHealth intervention development and feasibility RCT

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Plain English summary

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With age, people often develop an increasing number of health conditions that affect how they feel and their ability to remain independent. Some may struggle with decreased energy levels, low appetite, lower muscle strength and difficulty with household tasks such as shopping and cooking. However, few health services currently exist to help. This study aimed to design a new service to promote health for older people (aged 65 and over) experiencing such symptoms and test whether or not the service was acceptable.

We reviewed existing research to identify content areas for the new service including physical activity, socialising, poor nutrition and low mood. A total of 44 older people, 12 carers and 27 health/social care professionals from a variety of backgrounds told us that maintaining independence was the paramount issue for older people, and that the service should address keeping mobile and staying socially active, in addition to the specific issues of each individual. They recommended that the service be provided by trained, empathetic, non-specialist support workers.

Hence, we designed a new service, together with older people, health/social care professionals, the voluntary sector, policy-makers and experts. The service focused on maximising what older people already have and enjoy doing, supporting them to maintain this and address symptoms such as tiredness/weakness. It consisted of an average of five home-based appointments over 6 months.

We piloted our new service with 51 older people from four general practices. Half were randomly allocated to receive the service and after 6 months their outcomes were compared with those of people who had not received the service. We assessed whether or not it was feasible to run a larger study to test the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the new service. Findings suggested that the service was acceptable to people receiving it, showed promise in helping people stay independent and feel better, was of modest cost and merited a larger study (trial).

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