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- Electrical stimulation (E-stim) is the use of electrical current to create a desired effect in the body. This can be used to block pain signals and assist with pain relief. Electrical stimulation can be used to contract muscles in stroke victims, or patients who are post-surgical intervention. E-stim is often used in conjunction with cold laser therapy to promote better healing. It is provided usually by the applications of nodes to the skin on certain trigger points.
- Ultrasound therapy uses high-pitched sound waves to reduce muscle spasms and relax the muscles before or after exercise. It can be used to reduce pain. Ultrasound is provided via hands-on treatment with a handheld wand.

A plan of care for the elderly should not only take into consideration the medical and physical needs, but also nutritional, emotional, and psychological needs, and the quality of life of the patient. Other disciplines should be considered and consulted as needed to ensure a well-rounded approach. A patient should be referred to Speech Therapy for those with memory or swallowing disorders, and Occupational Therapy for those with difficulty with the finer motor muscles of the hands or issues with dressing, bathing, and self-care, amongst other problems. Psychiatric referrals should be made for patients suffering from depression, anxiety, and other mental decline. A Therapist cannot neglect the whole body approach, as although the major goal is to help physically, other disciplines may be appropriate in conjunction with Physical Therapy, as well as psychiatric care for those who require such interventions.

### ***Section 3: Summary***

Physical Therapy intervention can be useful in the treatment of many diseases or illnesses in the elderly. A well-designed plan of care follows an evaluation, and includes points such as diagnoses, goals, and descriptions of how to reach those goals. The plan includes daily treatment notes, progress updates, utilizes the SMART tool to ensure that goals are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. All the elements described should be included to document the proper treatments, reasons for treatments, progress of the patient, updates to care, and can be useful in motivating the patient. A successful treatment session should consist of obtaining the necessary information, performing the exercises and interventions, and conducting ongoing assessments of patient progress or decline. The plan of care should be updated as necessary, and documented upon completion of every therapeutic session. The Therapist should utilize the SOAP method of documentation, or Subjective, Objective, Assessment, and Plan portions, to ensure proper thorough recordings of patient issues, progression, treatments, possible declines, and to outline the plan for the patient going forward. As well as focussing on the Physical Therapy aspect, the

Therapist should keep in mind the possibility of the requirement of involving other disciplines, including Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and psychiatric care. Therapists need to focus on the elderly patient by taking a whole-body approach to provide comprehensive care.

### **Section 3: Key Concepts**

- **Akinesia** - loss or impairment of the power of voluntary movement.
- **Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease** - a chronic inflammatory lung disease that causes obstructed airflow from the lungs. Caused by long term exposure to lung irritants such as smoking, air pollution, chemical fumes, or specks of dust.
- **Constraint-induced movement therapy (CMT)** - a specialized approach used to increase the use of a limb affected or weakened as a result of a stroke or brain injury. The forced use of the weaker limb or area of the body instead of the stronger limb or area.
- **Diagnosis** - identification of the nature of an illness or other problem, by examination of the symptoms.
- **Dystonia** - a movement disorder of a muscle, muscle group, or the entire body that results in a person's muscles contracting uncontrollably. The contractions cause the affected body part to twist involuntarily, resulting in repetitive movements or abnormal postures.
- **Home Exercise Program** - a series of exercises that patients complete at home to maintain strength and increase therapeutic gains. Designed to continue a patient's recovery process outside the physical therapy office, by encouraging patients to participate in specific exercises.
- **Hypokinesia** - diminished power of movement, also known as hypomobility.
- **Modalities** - various methods of electrical, thermal, or mechanical energy treatments. Includes electrical stimulation, ultrasound, heat, ice therapy, and traction.
- **Multiple Sclerosis** - an unpredictable diseases of the central nervous system that disrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and body.
- **Plan of care** - a carefully prepared outline of care showing all the patient's needs and ways of meeting those needs. This is a dynamic document initiated upon evaluation and subject to continuous reassessment and change by the practitioner.
- **Prognosis** - the determination by the physical therapist of the predicted optimal level of improvement in function and the amount of time needed to reach that level.

- **SMART tool** - a tool used to ascertain that goals are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound.
- **SOAP** - the outline of a therapy daily note, including Subjective, Objective, Assessment, and Plan.

## Summary

During the aging process, it is expected for patients to begin to progressively weaken and experience cognitive decline. Exercises to improve stamina, endurance, flexibility, strength, and balance are important to assist the senior in maintaining their mobility and independence. Special consideration should be paid to seniors who have difficulty with memory issues, and any caregiver should be involved in the entire therapy process. The Therapist should also remind the caregiver to care for themselves, as they cannot properly care for their charge if they are worn out themselves. Emerging technology such as Telehealth should be considered to reach patients who are otherwise isolated, as this can be useful to discuss changes in the plan of care and monitor patients from afar. It can also be useful if there is an engaged caregiver who is able to perform activities under the supervision of a Therapist.

Polypharmacy should be a consideration and heavily monitored in the patient as the body metabolizes medications differently as the patient ages, and multiple medications can have a negative effect on the patient. In this vein, patients should be cautioned not to use alcohol with medications as the use of alcohol can interact poorly with most medications and cause undesired effects, such as exacerbation of the intended effects and increased risk of falls and confusion. Patients who take multiple medications should be monitored for behavioral or other physical changes.

A well-designed plan of care should be implemented by the Therapist that includes an evaluation, diagnoses, goals, and descriptions of how to reach these goals. The Smart Tool can be utilized to ensure that goals are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. A daily progress note is recommended to follow the SOAP model, with sections to describe subjective data, objective data, assessments, and plans for further care. The plan of care should be updated as necessary and documented well. The inclusion of other disciplines should be considered to provide a well-rounded approach to the overall well-being of the patient.

Physical Therapy for the senior patient should consider the patient's needs and personal goals, and motivate them to reach these goals while providing education and support along the way. Therapy can be a valuable tool to rehabilitate after injury, illness, or surgery, or to improve upon the patient's lives following the eventual expected decline. Therapy is useful in assisting to restore and improve functionality,

reduce pain, and increase mobility, strength, and safety, which are all aspects that make up the overall quality of life for the senior.

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