McMaster Optimal Aging Portal

A summary of

How to cite this NCCMT summary:

Categories:

Tool, Search, Adapt, Implement, Knowledge dissemination, Knowledge exchange

Tool

Relevance For Public Health

The intended audiences for the McMaster Optimal Aging Portal include public health professionals, as well as clinicians, policymakers and citizens/members of the public.

Given that the evidence has been assessed for quality with key action items clearly identified, the portal is an ideal knowledge source for public health professionals and educators to:

- access the latest high-quality health information on aging
- use and share this information through teaching and/or practice
- teach patients, clients and students how to critically assess health information they find online and make evidence-based decisions about healthy aging

For example, a community health nurse who supports older adults living at home may search for information on the portal and sign up for email alerts to answer her questions:

- How can she best help prevent falls among her clients?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of home care vs long-term care facilities for frail older adults? How do you know when it is time to make that move?
- What activities and support services are available to help with isolation and functional decline for older adults living at home?

Description

The purpose of the McMaster Optimal Aging Portal is to provide easy access to evidence-based information about healthy aging for health care professionals and their patients/clients.

There has been a recent shift in perceptions about aging. Rather than associating aging with physical and mental decline, the emphasis is progressively more on promoting "optimal aging": encouraging people to stay healthy, active and engaged for as long as possible. This, combined with a focus on "Aging in Place," means more older adults are managing their own health with the support of care providers such as nurses, home care workers and public health professionals.

Access to online health information can facilitate and enhance shared decision-making between patients and care providers. There is a lot of information available on the Internet relevant to optimal aging. The challenge is that much of this information has not been informed by good quality evidence and is therefore unlikely to provide useful answers to health questions and produce the purported health benefits.

The McMaster Optimal Aging Portal is unique among healthy aging information websites due to its rigorous quality appraisal that helps users filter through masses of health information and easily identify the highest quality resources.

Content is drawn from three internationally-recognized sources for public health, clinical and policymaking evidence on aging issues. Blog posts, web resource ratings and evidence summaries provide quick and easy-to-read "bottom line" messages, translating the evidence into formats that are easily understood by a wide audience. Tailored email alerts, Facebook and @Mac_AgingNews Twitter updates deliver the latest research evidence on headline topics directly to readers.

Implementing the Tool

Who is Involved?

Based at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, the portal draws from three internationally-recognized sources for evidence-based research (Health Evidence, Health Systems Evidence and McMasterPLUS). The leadership team members are all experts in their fields of evidence-based practice and knowledge translation. Two advisory councils (professional and citizen experts) provide guidance on website content, functionality and promotion.

The website is funded by the Labarge Optimal Aging Initiative.

Public health professionals, policy makers, clinicians, reserachers, educators, older adults, caregivers and those with an interest in healthy aging would find the portal relevant and of use.

Steps for Using Tool

The portal's features include the following:

- Content in 62 categories, including common health conditions (from "abnormal heart rhythms" to "vision problems"), heathcare delivery ("assisted living" to "testing and treatment decisions") and healthy aging practices ("alcohol use" to "women's health")
- A search function to find blog posts, evidence summaries and web resource ratings on a topic of interest
- A database of over 30,000 critically-appraised published research abstracts on topics relevant to healthy aging
- Email alerts including "What's new in healthy aging?" or any of three tailored professional alerts to keep up on the latest content added to the portal

Users can follow the portal at @Mac_AgingNews on twitter and receive updates on the latest aging news making headlines accompanied by the best related research evidence, as well as announcements and events relevant to healthy aging.

Conditions for Use

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Evaluation and Measurement Characteristics

Evaluation

Has been evaluated.

A usability study was conducted to gather experience and formative feedback from members of the target audience while engaging with the portal (Barbara et al., 2016). The findings of this usability evaluation focused on the content features for the general public. Most recently, a research proposal has been submitted to evaluate the impact of the portal on readers' knowledge, intentions and health behaviours.

Validity

Information not available

Reliability

Information not available

Methodological Rating

Not applicable

Tool Development

Developers

Maureen Dobbins

Method of Development

The McMaster Optimal Aging Portal was created by a team of researchers at McMaster University to reinforce the university's role as a leading authority in Canada on the study of aging. The portal is one of the programs of the Labarge Optimal Aging Initiative.

The portal was developed as an aging-focused repository for three internationally-recognized sources for evidence-based research (Health Evidence, Health Systems Evidence and McMasterPLUS). The aim of the portal is to interpret the messages of the highest quality and most relevant of this evidence into information appropriate for all audiences.

A proposal for development funds was accepted in 2012 and the website was officially launched for the public in October, 2014.

Release Date

2014

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Resources

Title of Primary Resource	McMaster Optimal Aging Portal
File Attachment	None
Web-link	http://www.mcmasteroptimalaging.org
Reference	
Type of Material	Website
Format	On-line Access
Cost to Access	None.
Language	English, French
Conditions for Use	None

Title of Supplementary Resource	The McMaster Optimal Aging Portal: Usability evaluation of a unique evidence-based health information website
File Attachment	None
Web-link	http://humanfactors.jmir.org/2016/1/e14/
Reference	Barbara, A. M., Dobbins, M., Haynes, B. R., Lorio, A., Lavis, J. N., Raina, P., & Levinson, A. J. (2016). The McMaster Optimal Aging Portal: Usability evaluation of a unique evidence-based health information website. *JMIR Human Factors, 3*(1), e14.
Type of Material	Journal
Format	Periodical
Cost to Access	None.
Language	English
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