Study Objective

The goal of this qualitative study was to understand the utility and usability of the app among a larger community sample of older adults living independently. Two smaller pilot studies were conducted in 2013 with samples of adults aged 55 and older living in Kitchener and Toronto. Feedback collected from the participants through SurveyMonkey spoke to the ease of the app, the mood tracker, and the ability to exercise “anywhere, anytime.” The later was a key finding as 68% stated they did not belong to an organized exercise program nor were interested in joining one. Suggestions to the app included incorporating a mechanism that would avoid the fixed sequence of the QiGong videos, so that user could stop and start any of the exercise videos offered by the app.

The provision of funds from the Emerging Scholar Mentorship Grant allowed us to make this revision to the app making this a second generation product. Funds also allowed us to recruit a wider audience of participants in which to administer the QiGong Wellness and Exercise App.

Methods

The present study was conducted under the ESMG and included a total of 47 participants living in Kitchener-Waterloo, Hamilton and Toronto. Recruited participants were between the ages of 44 and 70 with 92% over the age of 55 years. 70% of the participants were female as compared to male (30%). Participants were asked to do the following; record their mood on the app using a likert scale based upon five happy faces, do the recorded QiGong video exercises displayed on the app, record their mood after completing the QiGong exercises using the same likert scale. Participants were asked to do this activity three times per week for a period of four weeks and their mood was displayed on a calendar embedded into the app so that the participant could track any changes in their mood.

Conclusion

In summary, this study confirmed that adults over the age of 55 years are interested in mobile technology to increase their fitness level. It added new knowledge of making explicit the link between fitness and mood through the use of mobile technology. Our assumption that older adults appreciated the use of familiar colours as a navigation tool in the app (the same colours ones used in a traffic light) was confirmed as being accurate. Equally important, this study makes an important contribution to the literature challenging the perception that older adults lack or are uninterested in digital literacy (Melenhorst, Rogers and Caylor, 2011; Rogers and Mynatt, 2013). In the current milieu of individuals requesting autonomy for self monitoring of their health, the use of mobile technology is a critical one to continue exploring.

Challenges

Several challenges resulted in this study just being completed. As such we have not fully explored future funding opportunities. However, as mentioned in our initial application we are hoping to pursue the CIHR Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research (SPOR) – Patient Engagement Element. The objective of SPOR is to foster evidence-informed health care by bringing innovative diagnostic and therapeutic approaches to the point of care, so as to ensure greater quality, accountability, and accessibility of care to the service user.

Acknowledgements

Our mentor was available to us in the ways described in our application. We are hoping to co-author the results of this study in addition to seeking Dr. Lee’s interest and availability for the SPOR funding opportunity. My co-researcher and I have also been invited as speakers to the International Health QiGong Federation World Health QiGong Scientific Symposium in Holland, 2017 to present the results of this study.

In summary, this study would not have been made possible if not for the funding and general direction provided through the Network for Aging Research. We are very appreciate to have been funded and will acknowledge all work resulting from this study as a result of NAR funding.