

THE POISE PROJECT

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'Partnering with Poise': Alexander technique online group classes are a promising intervention to decrease loss-of-self and increase agency for care partners of people living with dementia

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Background: Studies show 1:1 in-person Alexander technique (AT) sessions can reduce anxiety and musculoskeletal pain with long-term benefits [1-4]. Care partners (CP) often experience role engulfment and loss of self [5]. AT is an embodied approach to choose functional patterns that transform disruptive stress reactions to adaptive responses, increasing confidence, self-control, and self-awareness. Previous in-person group course results from 71 Parkinson's CP showed promise with benefits retained at 12 months. COVID-19 provided an opportunity to test synchronous online AT-based courses for CP of people living with dementia.

Method: Design: Controlled feasibility trial. AT group: 14 participants (11F/3M) from 9 states; mean age 68; 72% provided 41+ hrs/wk care for family member with dementia; 13 lived with care-receiver. Control group: 9 participants (8F/1M) from 4 states; mean age 63; 67% provided 41+ hrs/wk care; 6 lived with family care-receiver. AT groups met 90 min/week x 10wks. **Intervention:** Delivered in-home via Zoom. Embodied self-management strategies included intentional strategies to interrupt automatic reactions and affirm centrality of the self, taught via verbal and visual instruction, activities, anatomical models/images, and demonstration videos. AT principles were embedded in everyday activities (gait, sit-to-stand, IADLs, etc.). **Outcome Measures:** Self-report, executive function, anonymous evaluations, interviews.

Result: 70% retention, 87% attendance. AT group improved executive function (Digit Span $p=.003$; Stroop $p=.05$); control group did not. AT group reported increased self-efficacy (caregiver scale $p=.08$); and reduced fear ($p=.004$); control group did not. On 0-10 scale, mean rating was >9 for novelty of ideas, practical tools for physical self-management, and would recommend to a friend; and >8 for enjoyment of group interaction, practical tools for self-management of emotions and reactions, and prevention of pain; 7.9 for feeling better prepared for CP daily challenges. Six-month follow-up is underway.

Conclusion: Alexander technique shows promise as a long-term self-management approach to reduce loss-of-self in CP of people living with cognitive decline. Group classes can provide cost-effective delivery with social benefits. Online classes can increase accessibility. A full-scale study is merited.

1.Little (2008) 2.MacPherson (2015) 3.Klein (2014) 4.Stallibrass (2002) 5.Skaff, Pearlin (1992)