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Introduction

The challenges that the ageing population will present to the dental profession has long been forecast and the word “frail” is often mentioned. But what does this word mean? Do we eyeball a person and say they are frail? Is it a binary decision: frail/not frail?

In my search for answers, I came across the Rockwood Clinical Frailty Scale, which is widely used in geriatric medicine on a global level. Clinical descriptors and pictographs allow clinicians to recognise and quantify frailty.

Aim

The aim of this poster is to define the word Frail and to present the Rockwood Clinical Frailty Scale.

Definition of Frailty:

The British Geriatrics Society define frailty as **“a distinctive health state related to the ageing process in which multiple body systems gradually lose their in-built reserves”**.¹

The Scale:

Clinical Frailty Scale*

 **1 Very Fit** – People who are robust, active, energetic and motivated. These people commonly exercise regularly. They are among the fittest for their age.

 **2 Well** – People who have **no active disease symptoms** but are less fit than category 1. Often, they exercise or are very **active occasionally**, e.g. seasonally.

 **3 Managing Well** – People whose **medical problems are well controlled**, but are **not regularly active** beyond routine walking.

 **4 Vulnerable** – While **not dependent** on others for daily help, often **symptoms limit activities**. A common complaint is being “slowed up”, and/or being tired during the day.

 **5 Mildly Frail** – These people often have **more evident slowing**, and need help in **high order IADLs** (finances, transportation, heavy housework, medications). Typically, mild frailty progressively impairs shopping and walking outside alone, meal preparation and housework.

 **6 Moderately Frail** – People need help with **all outside activities** and with **keeping house**. Inside, they often have problems with stairs and need **help with bathing** and might need minimal assistance (cuing, standby) with dressing.

 **7 Severely Frail** – **Completely dependent for personal care**, from whatever cause (physical or cognitive). Even so, they seem stable and not at high risk of dying (within ~ 6 months).

 **8 Very Severely Frail** – **Completely dependent**, approaching the end of life. Typically, they could not recover even from a minor illness.

 **9. Terminally Ill** - Approaching the end of life. This category applies to people with a **life expectancy <6 months**, who are **not otherwise evidently frail**.

Scoring frailty in people with dementia

The degree of frailty corresponds to the degree of dementia. Common **symptoms in mild dementia** include forgetting the details of a recent event, though still remembering the event itself, repeating the same question/story and social withdrawal.

In **moderate dementia**, recent memory is very impaired, even though they seemingly can remember their past life events well. They can do personal care with prompting.

In **severe dementia**, they cannot do personal care without help.

* 1. Canadian Study on Health & Aging, Revised 2008.
2. K. Rockwood et al. A global clinical measure of fitness and frailty in elderly people. CMAJ 2005;173:489-495.

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Relevance to Dentistry

Dental treatment planning for the ageing population can be complex and the decision between radical anticipatory care or the carefully-considered option of not treating disease may be a grey area. The Clinical Frailty Scale provides a reminder of the heterogeneity of ageing and can be used as an educational tool, helping dentists to recognise and quantify frailty which can aid clinical decision-making, justify treatment decisions and improve interprofessional communication.

The tool can particularly help newly-qualified clinicians to evaluate the risks/benefits of treatment options and may alleviate litigation concerns when recorded in patient notes.

Conclusion

The world’s population is ageing. The Clinical Frailty Scale is validated, quick to apply and avoids bias.

It is not a panacea to treatment planning for the ageing population – but it is another tool to have in the tool-kit when dealing with complexity.

References

- (1) British Geriatrics Society. (2014) Introduction to Frailty, Fit for Frailty Part 1. Available at: <https://www.bgs.org.uk/resources/introduction-to-frailty>
- (2) The 9-point Clinical Frailty Scale was adapted from the 7-point scale used in the Canadian Study of Health and Aging (CMAJ 2005;173:489-495) and has been reprinted with the permission of The Geriatric Medicine Research, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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