THE PHYSICAL THERAPY EXPERIENCE FOR OLDER ADULTS FOLLOWING AN INJURIOUS FALL REQUIRING HOSPITALIZATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

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Background and Purpose: Physical therapists often provide a component of care for older adults as they transition home after being hospitalized for an injury sustained in a fall. The goal of this study is to describe the experiences of older adults who have fallen and received physical therapy and to explore how physical therapy services may be improved.

Subjects: Ten adults and one caregiver 65 years or older who were hospitalized and received physical therapy following an injurious fall within the last three years.

Methods and Materials: A phenomenological approach was used. Participants were asked to describe their therapy experiences, how they were cared for, and how they were impacted by physical therapy through semi-structured face-to-face or phone interviews. Analysis: The transcripts from the interviews were coded and analyzed. Next, themes and sub-themes were identified by a team of five researchers.

Results: Based on the analysis of the interviews, three main themes emerged: interpersonal sensitivity in patient-therapist interactions, mind-body engagement during knowledge and skill acquisition, and post-therapy reflective insights of the patient.

Conclusions: Overall, the patients' perceived caring attitudes and behaviors of their physical therapist(s) and identified positive experiences within physical therapy. Patients' described physical therapy as a factor that impacted their road to recovery. However, based on the patients' recall of their sessions, there is room for improvement in patient education, especially with fall prevention.

Implications: This study provides insights into the lived-experience of older adults in physical therapy that can be used to guide physical therapists in optimizing patients' recovery within a human caring framework. It demonstrates the need for physical therapists to develop strategies to effectively and consistently educate on the multifactorial components of fall prevention.