Task-specific Motor Training in Older Adults with and without Cognitive Impairment

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abstract

Task-specific training is a neurorehabilitative approach in which patients repetitively practice an activity of daily living to promote skill re-learning. The increasing number of patients over age 65, however, suggests that many may have underlying age-related cognitive impairments that could affect their responsiveness to this approach. By studying task-specific training in older adults with and without cognitive impairments, we are beginning to test whether current clinical neurorehabilitation should be modified based on a patient’s age or cognitive status. This talk will consider responsiveness to task-specific training not only as improvement on the task that is practiced (i.e. ‘practice effects’), but also as generalized improvements on tasks that are not practiced (i.e. ‘transfer effects’). Emerging data on the potential role of visuospatial function on training responsiveness will also be discussed.

biosketch

Sydney Schaefer is currently an Assistant Professor in Exercise Science at Utah State University. She earned her undergraduate degree in Sports Medicine from Pepperdine University. She then received her PhD in Kinesiology with an emphasis in Motor Control from the Pennsylvania State University, and completed her postdoctoral training in stroke rehabilitation at Washington University in St. Louis in the Biomedical Engineering and Physical Therapy programs. Her current research aims to improve upper extremity neurorehabilitation in older adults by studying how aging and cognitive impairment affect motor skill learning. Her work has been funded by the National Institutes of Health and the American Heart Association.