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Caregiver Perspectives on Body-Weight Supported Treadmill Training as an Intervention for Young Children with Cerebral Palsy

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PURPOSE & HYPOTHESIS
- Children with cerebral palsy (CP) in Gross Motor Function Classification System (GMFCS) levels IV & V present with challenges that impact their functional activities & participation in family activities.
- Body weight supported treadmill training (BWSTT) may improve motor control for children with neuromotor disabilities (Morgan et al 2016, Mattern-Baxter et al 2009)
- Caregiver perspectives on this intense intervention are worth exploring (Kruijsest-Terpstra et al 2016, Beveridge et al 2015, Knis-Matthews et al 2011)

The purpose of this study was to examine caregivers’ perspectives on body-weight supported treadmill training (BWSTT) as an intervention for their young children with CP.

METHODS
- Participants included 4 caregivers of 3 children (2 parents of 1 child & 1 parent each of 2 children) with CP in GMFCS levels IV & V who previously participated in 6 wks of BWSTT, 3 x/ wk.
- Participating children were 2 to 3 yrs old, each presenting with different type of CP: spastic diplegia (GMFCS level IV), spastic triplegia (GMFCS level IV), & spastic quadriplegia (GMFCS level V).

RESULTS
- Participants were able to transport children to the BWSTT intervention with an average attendance rate of 94%.
- Careful triangulation of the interview data led to the identification of 3 common themes & 1 overarching theme based on caregiver perceptions of the BWSTT program.

CONCLUSIONS
- Caregivers were able to transport children to the BWSTT intervention, their children improved in motivation to walk, & with head/trunk control.
- Caregivers of the children all expressed the desire to continue the program & stated that they would participate again if given the chance.
- They also emphasized the importance of other therapies to address issues such as feeding & communication.

OVERARCHING THEME:
Acceptance of the journey

THREE EMERGENT THEMES:
- Caregiving
  - Support system
  - Physical & emotional strain
  - Routines
- Future outlook
  - Optimism
  - Facing challenges
  - Fears & worries
- Importance of therapies
  - Traditional physical therapy (PT)
  - BWSTT
  - Other therapies more important than PT

INTERVIEW:
- The caregivers of the children were asked to participate in face to face semi-structured interviews after the BWSTT intervention ended with their children.
- Interviews were audio recorded & transcribed.
- Interviews lasted between 20 to 40 minutes.
- Each participant was interviewed one-on-one (no other family members present).
- Analysis of the interviews was conducted through open coding to identify emerging categories by the principal investigator.
- A secondary investigator independently coded 50% of the transcripts to triangulate the coding for trustworthiness.
- The two investigators then discussed the codes & categories until an agreement was reached to identify the emergent themes & an overarching theme.

OVERARCHING THEME:
He’s moving his head a lot more and before he wasn’t, so his quality of life has opened up as far as what’s around him and being more aware. The fact that he can propel himself in that gait trainer gives him some individual independence and so he can kind of move himself to wherever he wants to go. – “M”

“I want to be hopeful. And I want things to happen faster, but it’s not. And I’m losing patience, you know?” – “G”

“I’m just 3, so I mean he’s already showing so much potential. We thought, you know, it’s going to be pretty limited, but with the way he’s going we’re seeing more potential in him moving himself, him talking, and those are all very exciting things for us.” – “M”

Thank you to the caregivers who consistently brought their children to the clinic, participated in the interviews, & trusted us through this process.