



# Balance and discharge destination outcomes for patients referred to physiotherapy at Bellingen and Macksville Hospitals



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## Introduction

Australia has an ageing population which will continue to have an increasing effect on the both the aged care and health care systems. Accurate and timely assessment of need for aged care services will become even more important. Premature assessment for aged care can be expected to lead to the inappropriate and wasteful use of scarce aged care resources, while needlessly delayed assessment may lead to inappropriate and wasteful use of health care resources. There is a particular group of elderly people for whom entry into residential aged care facilities is inappropriate. These patients are not acutely unwell enough to require very acute care and yet are unable to participate in rehabilitation programs. Small hospitals have an important role in providing care for these elderly patients, although there is a lack of evidence describing outcomes for these patients in this setting.

## Method

This study investigated 89 patients (median age 84) receiving physiotherapy for mobility or balance in Bellingen and Macksville Hospitals. This study quantitatively described inpatient change in balance and factors associated with discharge to nursing home.

## Results

- Baseline and discharge measurements found inpatients functional balance improved significantly 8.5/56 (95% CI 6.3 – 10.6 p <0.001).
- Physiotherapists' estimates were useful in predicting how much balance would change (mean error 7/56).
- There was a large amount of variability in people's change in balance, underlining the importance of avoiding premature placement in an aged care facility.
- Balance at discharge was found to strongly correlate with probability of discharge to nursing home, emphasising the importance of providing resources to maximise the balance of elderly people in hospital.
- No correlation was found between carer availability and probability of discharge to nursing home. This suggests that local aged care services are effectively allowing people to return home, even without a carer.

## Conclusion

This study has shown that physiotherapy intervention is associated with statistically and clinically significant positive balance outcomes for patients, and provides objective evidence identifying elderly people for whom entry to nursing home may be appropriate and inappropriate.

*For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'*

Stephen is a physiotherapist working for the Transitional Aged Care Service in the Bellingen and Nambucca areas. He is particularly interested in falls prevention and helping older people to remain living independently in the community. Stephen has previously worked for the Coffs Harbour aged care assessment team.

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