Abstract

The Nintendo Wii and other active video games have allowed people to enjoy a physically engaging entertainment experience. These games have become popular even among elderly residents in retirement communities. Yet despite extensive research on the pediatric social and physical benefits of active video games, little data is available concerning their effects in geriatric populations.

Methods

• The first step of the project was to conduct in-depth interviews with the service coordinators at three independent living facilities that have successful ongoing Wii programs for seniors.
• We were also interested in finding out from the service coordinators what lessons they learned along the way in developing their programs.
• The second step of the research was to conduct a survey of seniors who participate in Wii programs on a regular basis at each of the three facilities.
• The goals of the survey were to find out the characteristics of seniors who play Wii, what games they play, how often they play, and to explore seniors’ perceptions of risks and benefits to playing the Wii.
• The third step of the research was to conduct focus groups with seniors who participate in Wii programs at each facility. The focus groups expressed desire to use more games and have more opportunities to use the Wii game system. All except one senior viewed the Wii game sessions as entertaining and beneficial to their health.

CONCLUSION: We have found Wii Sports use can be a positive activity for seniors. It offers both social and health benefits to participants and is easy to use even for seniors with limited gaming experiences.

Background

The researchers conducted a survey of seniors who play Wii to find out the goals of the survey were to find out the characteristics of seniors who play Wii, what games they play, how often they play, and to explore seniors’ perceptions of risks and benefits to playing the Wii. The first step of the project was to conduct in-depth interviews with the service coordinators at three independent living facilities that have successful ongoing Wii programs for seniors. The second step of the research was to conduct a survey of seniors who participate in Wii programs on a regular basis at each of the three facilities. The goals of the survey were to find out the characteristics of seniors who play Wii, what games they play, how often they play, and to explore seniors’ perceptions of risks and benefits to playing the Wii. The third step of the research was to conduct focus groups with seniors who participate in Wii programs at each facility. The focus groups expressed desire to use more games and have more opportunities to use the Wii game system. All except one senior viewed the Wii game sessions as entertaining and beneficial to their health.

Characteristics of Seniors Who Play Wii (N=21)

Table: Characteristics of Seniors Who Play Wii

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
<td>85.25 (range 74-93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male)</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical school</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced degree</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents who report that they continue to enjoy playing Wii</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Service Coordinator interviews showed that all three programs shared:
• One game system at the facility
• Video game programs running for several years
• Bowling as the most popular and often used game
• Mostly Caucasian gamers

Service Coordinator interviews also elucidated the following differences in the programs:
• How new players learned to play the active video game: One facility had veteran gamers instructing new players vs. the activity director filling this teaching role at other two facilities
• Level of senior autonomy and supervision with game activities: Two facilities only had the Wii system available for residents at a set time weekly with staff present during the game session vs. one location where the game is signed out for group use at various scheduled times during week with the gamers setting up the equipment and tracking scores independently

Lessons Learned About Developing a Wii Program

• Make sure the program is well advertised at the facility.
• Provide an orientation session to familiarize seniors with the games and show them how to play.
• Make game available to seniors and their family members for a multigenerational playing experience.
• Provide opportunities for team competitions either within or between facilities.

Conclusions & Discussion

• Wii Sports use can be a positive activity for seniors.
• Seniors self-report social and health benefits.
• Wii enhanced, not replaced, other activities.
• Bowling was the most popular game.
• 90% reported no injuries from playing.
• Easy to use regardless of gaming experience and age.