Parkinson’s disease (PD) is estimated to affect between 6-7 million people worldwide (Penko et al., 2020).

Recently, figures have shown the rate of PD growth being the fastest of all neurological diseases, with an estimated 6 million people now affected (Alam, 2020). PD is characterized by both motor and cognitive deficits, typically seen through symptoms including bradykinesia, tremors, rigidity, postural instability, fatigue, gait dysfunction, decreased executive function and sleep disturbance (Gusso et al., 2016).

Occupations requiring both motor and nonmotor skills, such as IADLs, are often identified as difficult before these tasks become more physically oriented, especially early on in the progression of PD. Subsequently, individuals withdraw from them altogether, resulting in decreased productivity, independence, occupational participation and function in general, and ultimately their overall quality of life (Davis et al., 2019, Foster et al., 2021).

These difficulties are recognized in recent research as prodromal symptoms noted years prior to actual PD diagnosis (Fosher-Samier et al., 2020).

Early diagnosis and an increase of OT in PD care, providing therapy earlier in disease progression to slow functional decline and progression of PD, is a vital aspect of occupational therapy (Salm, 2008).

OTs address both motor and nonmotor performance difficulties by helping these individuals improve or maintain their functional abilities concerning their daily occupations, increase independence and quality of life longer (Abbruzzese et al., 2016, Foster et al., 2021).

The use of rehab interventions including fall prevention, transfer training, fatigue management, and addressing ADLs have demonstrated positive effects on occupational participation, maintaining independence, and quality of life for those with PD (Radder et al., 2017, Weibly et al., 2019).

The importance of increased PD care is even more significant for those residing in rural areas because of the issues of limited access, treatment options, and local resources (Singh et al., 2020).

**Methodology**

The purpose of the capstone experience and project was to investigate the impact of PD on ADL performance emphasizing the need for earlier diagnosis and the value of timelier occupational therapy intervention. This was designed to support rural/underserved populations that are not currently managing their PD due to inadequate awareness, access, options, or resources.

**Results**

• All five of the objectives were met and all deliverables completed. The research was conducted using the virtual grocery store task and used in the development of an assessment to be used to score participants’ performance on the IADL task.

• ‘Young adult’ group: ‘No challenge’
• ‘Healthier adults’ group: ‘Minimally challenged’ – ‘Moderately challenging’
• ‘Those with PD’ group: ‘Moderately challenged’ – ‘Greatly challenged’

• Results: the IADL assessment were used in analyzing the most problematic parts and underlying factors to select topics to be discussed at the PD Focus Group in Sioux Center. The chosen topics included:
  - Education and Management, Health and Exercise, Cognitive Training, Fall Prevention, Emotion Control and Socialization, Participation and Re-engagement in Meaningful Activities
  - The PD Focus Group drew anywhere from fourteen to twenty-one people between, persons, environment, and task, with most of those with PD IADL assessment respondents.

• Based on positive verbal feedback and engagement in weekly discussions and activities of group members, the program was effective in expanding knowledge, providing resources and tools for PD management, offering support and engagement with others.

• A modified client satisfaction questionnaire was performed at the conclusion of the program, which also found positive reflections of perceived satisfaction through intermittent observation and closed-ended questions.

- Results of interval questions:
  - The program was good/excellent
  - Few felt very satisfied with the help they received
  - Most felt satisfied with the support they received
  - Would recommend this program to a friend
  - Would certainly come back to this program

• Consequences of the program:
  - Enjoy the fun, organized atmosphere
  - Benefit of meeting and learning from others’ experiences
  - Like receiving information, practical tips, professional expertise
  - Desire for more information for caregivers and additional topics such as medication management

- Occupational therapists are in a perfect position to advocate for and support the growing population earlier in disease progression to prevent further disability and disengagement.
- Recognizing and intervening in occupational therapy in PD care to improve health outcomes and enhance quality of life.
- Inform other healthcare professionals of the benefits of early therapy to maintain function with less impact on disease progression and specifically what services OT can provide.
- Work in collaboration, as a team, with other healthcare professionals to ensure the best care is provided for these individuals.
- Promote and encourage members of this population to start or get moving as soon as possible.
- Other tools, advice, support and even suggestions for adaptations, modifications, and prevention strategies for these individuals to encourage continued occupational participation.
- Impactful, performance, and quality of life in rural areas, where individuals have limited access and more likely to be unfamiliar with the valuable, recommended resources that are available, is important for increasing care.

**Implications/Recommendations**

As the rate of PD continues to rise at an alarming rate, more individuals are experiencing both motor and non-motor symptoms resulting in difficulties with various daily activities leading to decreased engagement, performance, and quality of life. Occupational therapists have the unique knowledge and abilities to manage or overcome these obstacles and provide valuable support for individuals in maintaining their independence. Further referrals for rehabilitation are critical for providing these individuals with the best opportunities to manage PD and ultimately slow the progression of PD. Based on the conclusions of this capstone experience and project, one of the best ways to support increased care for those with PD is to offer programs similar to the PD Focus Group discussed in this paper. Consequently, it is essential for occupational therapists to address the needs of and advocate for this rapidly growing population earlier, to prevent further disability, improve health outcomes, and enhance their quality of life.