

RECOVERY AND CARE NEEDS OF OLDER ADULTS AND CAREGIVERS: FRAIL SUB-STUDY OF THE FIT AFTER SURGERY STUDY

Nelly Toledano^{1*}, *Nicholas Legacy*^{1*}, *Cydney Low*¹, *Kristen Haase*², *Henriette Breunis*³, *Duminda Wijeyesundera*⁴, *Sahar Ehtesham*⁴, *Eric Pitters*⁵, *Douglas Stephens*⁶, *Fay Bennie*⁷, *Anne Stephens*⁸, *Gianni Lorello*², *Kerri Kuluski*⁵, *Daniel McIsaac*⁶, *Tyler Chesney*⁴, *Naveed Siddiqui*⁷, *Karim Ladha*⁴, *David Mazer*⁴, *Noah Crampton*², *Stuart A McCluskey*², *Matteo Parotto*², *Lisa Del Giudice*⁸, *Angela Jerath*⁸, *Janet VanVlymen*⁹, *Su-Yin MacDonnell*¹⁰, *Melinda Davis*¹¹, *Alex Gregory*¹¹, *Eric Jacobsohn*¹², *David MacDonald*¹³, *Katherine S. McGilton*^{1,2}, *Shabbir Alibhai*², *Martine Puts*¹

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the recovery process and supportive care needs of frail older adults and their caregivers after major surgery. A significant proportion of patients underwent cancer surgery

METHODS

- The Frail sub-study of the FIT AFTER SURGERY Study employed a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and qualitative interviews with patients and caregivers.
- Patients were recruited from 19 centres across Canada.
- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with frail older adults (aged 65 years or older) who had undergone major surgery, and their caregivers were conducted at three and six months after discharge.
- The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS: The thematic analysis, based on a sample of frail older adults (n=43) and their caregivers (n=21), identified several key themes impacting the recovery process:

- **Post-Operative Recovery: Patient Challenges and Essential Support Needs.** Many data points highlight patients' challenges during post-op recovery: complications, dietary/sleep changes, transportation needs, assistive devices, and informal caregiver support. The need for patient education, setting realistic expectations, and communication with care providers is emphasized. Urgent surgeries may affect the patient's and family's ability to prepare and educate themselves.
- *"The complications I faced after surgery were overwhelming. I didn't expect to need so much help with basic things like eating and sleeping"*
- **Psychosocial and Financial Impacts of Surgery.** Surgery impacts mental health, causing stress, anxiety, and depression, and adds financial strain due to unexpected out-of-pocket costs for physiotherapy, home adaptation, mobility devices, ostomy supplies, and private care.
- *"It's not just the physical recovery that's tough; the emotional and financial stress can be just as challenging"*
- *"I wish I had known about the potential costs of supplies before surgery; it would have helped me prepare better."*

- **Healthcare Team support after discharge.** Significant gaps in home care, discharge coordination, and access to post-surgery support services, including physiotherapy and OT assessments, highlight the critical need for bridging supportive care to discharge.
- *"The immediate discharge period was the most challenging time, and I needed more support than I received."*
- **Family and Social Support Needs:** Many patients underestimated the extent and duration of support needed for meal preparation, ADLs, transportation, wound care, and health system navigation, with gendered differences in care expectations and burden noted.
- *"I underestimated the duration of support I would need, and it put a lot of pressure on my family."*
- **Impact of Pain and Pain Management.** Pain significantly affects recovery, impacting functional status, rehabilitation, mental health, social isolation, and delaying return to work, highlighting the need for effective pain management.
- *"I felt like I couldn't make any progress in my recovery because the pain was so intense."*
- **CONCLUSIONS:**
- **Personalized supportive care for frail older adults and their caregivers, especially for cancer patients, is crucial before and after surgery to improve recovery and care quality. Tailored resources for caregivers enhance the well-being of both.**



1 Lawrence Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. 2 School of Nursing, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. 3 University Health Network, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. 4 Unity Health, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. 5 Trillium Health Partners, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. 6 The Ottawa Hospital, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. 7 Sinai Health System, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. 8 Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. 9 Kingston General Hospital, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. 10 Providence Healthcare, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. 11 Foothills Medical Centre, Calgary, Alberta, Canada. 12 Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. 13 Queen Elizabeth II Health Centre, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Corresponding author: Dr. Martine Puts RN PhD FAAN, Lawrence Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto, 155 College Street Suite 130, Toronto, M5T 1P8, Ontario, Canada. Tel +1 416 978-6059, martine.puts@utoronto.ca