Perceptions of the concept of physical activity among older people and staff in residential homes

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This presentation aims to present parts of my doctoral work focusing on the ability and desire to be physically active when you live in a residential home for the elderly. The aim for this part of the study was to identify and describe variations in perceptions of the concept for “physical activity”.

Physical activity is described as positive and important for all people. My thesis is to investigate how people are interested in, and able to, maintaining physical activities even though they often have significant disabilities. And also to investigate how older people in residential homes are experiencing opportunities for physical activity and how their physical environment affects these opportunities.

The part of my studies that will be presented have a phenomenografic approach was used to analyze semistructuratured interviews with elderly people living on residential homes and with staff. This took place in four residential homes in two municipalities in Sweden.

The interviews show that the older people often describes physical activity in one way when asked about what the concept of physical activity means to them and sometimes also states that physical activity is something that they do not perform. Later in the interview the very same person can describe the activities of a physical nature which they do in everyday life, for example to walk. A number of staff do describe that physically activity is one thing when it comes to themselves, but something else when it comes to the older people. To have different perceptions of a central concept can affect both hopes and expectations.