

Rochester/Olmsted County Falls Prevention Coalition Newsletter

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Interventions for Fear of Falling (FOF)

Because the factors that contribute to FOF are many, treatment to address the fear must also be multidimensional. Interventions recommended include

1. Education
2. Environmental safety considerations
3. Discussion of risk-taking behaviors
4. Assertiveness training
5. Physical fitness

The goal of the education is to instill confidence and perceived control of falls. This helps them move from self-defeating thoughts to motivating thoughts on controlling this fear.

Environmental modification can be identified during a VIPS- home safety visit. Common examples are removing throw rugs, placing night lights in the bathroom, and having a handrail in a staircase. Providing older adults with information they could use to recognize and alter the environmental hazards that increase fall risk allowed them to take control over this aspect of their fear. Assertiveness training and discussion of risk-taking behaviors were components of this multidimensional approach, because the older adults needed to learn to



ask for assistance when in a situation where they were fearful. They also needed to feel comfortable discussing their fear with family, friends, and health care

providers. Encouragement from friends and family to ask for assistance and to discuss their FOF may have made the patients more at ease in participating in the FOF interventions. Maintaining or improving the physical fitness levels of older adults is an important component of current fall-risk reduction programs, because it can restore a person's confidence in his or her mobility. Successful mobility in activities that people need to perform on a regular basis may build their confidence, when combined with knowledge about falls and fall risks and the assertiveness to ask for assistance when they need it.

Resource: Legters, Kristine. Fear of Falling. *PhysTher* March 2002 vol. 82

IN THIS ISSUE

- ◆ Interventions for Fear of Falling (FOF)
- ◆ Thank you to Participants in the Falls Prevention Coalition Survey
- ◆ Psychological Impact of Falls in the Elderly
- ◆ How to request Falls Prevention information:

Thank you to Participants in the Falls Prevention Coalition Survey!

This fall the Rochester/Olmsted County Falls Prevention Coalition sent a survey to primary care providers in Olmsted County seeking information about falls-related resources used in clinical practice and what providers felt they were missing. Fifty-five practitioners in internal medicine, family medicine, and geriatrics responded (40% response). The preliminary results reveal several opportunities for the Falls Prevention Coalition to aid or partner with area providers to improve comfort with and access to falls prevention information and community resources. In the next several newsletters, we will highlight some of the results of this survey. We look forward to sharing your collective responses with you, and we thank you again for your participation as we endeavor to reduce falls in our community.

Psychological Impact of Falls in the Elderly

A fall in an older person is devastating, embarrassing and degrading to them and their family. It's also a reminder that there are other consequences that are often ignored or not considered. The Rochester/ Olmsted County Falls Prevention Coalition educates locally on the many other consequences falls have with seniors, such as fear, isolation, loss of independence and decreased confidence. New 2012 research has found that the fear of falling means 225,000 people aged over 75 won't leave the house by themselves.

Research shows that 35% of seniors have fallen in the last two years with 32% of those living alone suffering a fall in the last year.

We know that the impact of falls in people over age of 65, goes far beyond the physical pain and potential injury. Over one fifth (21%) of older people who had suffered a fall in the last five years have lost their confidence as a result, with 10% saying they are now less independent.

The devastating impact falls can have on the mental well-being of older people and how a lack of confidence, result in falling or worrying about falling, leads to isolation and loneliness. Despite this, 38% did not inform their doctor about their fall.

In winter, there is a higher risk of social isolation and increased risk of falls, due to uncertain weather conditions outdoors. The lack of independence and confidence is often exacerbated during the winter months as the majority of older people (52%) say they feel much more vulnerable to falling in winter.

"These are bleak findings. In winter, older people have little confidence to get out and about because they fear they will fall and as this research shows, the psychological effects of worrying about a fall can be as debilitating and devastating as physical injuries. But there are solutions available; because we know

that services such as those provided by our volunteers help older people live happy, healthy and independent lives. We would urge anyone who isn't feeling confident about going out to get in touch with us as we can arrange a volunteer to accompany them on trips to the shops or to social events or for volunteer-run transport services that will give them back their independence and quality of life."

-----David McCullough, chief executive, WRVS

2012 Data reports men and women over 75 also state:

- 6% of those who suffered a fall were unable to get up for an hour or more.
- 62% of those who had a fall suffered injury; 40% of these described their injuries as moderate or extensive.
- More than 1 in 20 (7%) think no-one would notice if they had a fall because they don't see anyone for days.
- 23% say poor street conditions (poor lighting, poor pavements) make them feel less confident about leaving the house.
- These fears also increase with age - over one in five (21%) of those aged 75 – 79 are worried about suffering a fall, compared to over one in three (35%) aged over 85.

Research also highlights a worrying lack of support for those who have suffered a fall, as 76% of those who suffered extensive injuries following a fall in the last five years, haven't received a visit from a falls prevention team.

Resource:

www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.

Falls can be prevented and it's very important that those who have suffered a fall get the help they need to ensure it doesn't happen again. Accessing volunteer services, such as friendly visitors, elder peer support, and companions, are low-cost (and often free), and is an easy way to help reduce the risk of isolation for those who have little support.

How to request Falls Prevention information:

Falls Prevention

Presentation: Please contact Kori Petersson at 507-251-2662 to schedule a presentation for your community group (presentations are FREE and open to the public)

VIPS Home Safety Visit (FREE): Please call 507-328-6895 (Volunteers In Public Safety-Rochester Police Department/Crime Prevention)

Preventing Slips, Trips, and Broken Hips DVD: Call Public Health at 507-328-7500 or Elder Network at 507-285-5272 for your *free DVD copy*

www.co.olmsted.mn.us/OCPHS/



The Rochester/Olmsted County Falls Prevention Coalition's mission is to provide a network of services to citizens 55+ to help decrease the number of falls and severity of falls in order to maintain independence in their home.