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Falls leading to fractured hip experienced by older people living in residential care in Australia

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Introduction

Falls continue to be a major issue for older people living in residential care, and the costs of falls associated with fractured neck of femur are escalating. In the Hunter area of Australia 25% of all fractured hips occur in people in residential care, and the mortality rate is high post fracture. Estimates suggest that 50% of these falls are preventable. Consequences of falls for residents are significant and contribute to occupational deprivation for an already at-risk group.

Objectives

To identify the retrospective profile of residents who sustained a fractured neck of femur due to a fall and to develop recommendations for prevention.

Methods

88 aged care facilities with more than 20 beds, that provided both high and low care, and located in the Hunter New England Area Health Service, participated in the study. Data were collected from a standard reporting tool used by each facility. Numerical and qualitative written data were entered into SPSS and descriptive analysis of numerical data, and content analysis of the free comments written by staff, was conducted.

Results

404 falls leading to a fractured neck of femur were recorded. The highest number of falls were experienced by residents within a month of admission to the facility (n=47, 12%) and nearly half of falls occurred within a year of admission (n=182, 47%). Only 10% of falls were witnessed. Most falls took place in the resident's bedroom (40%), and falls were attributed to difficulty transferring (6%), obstacles (5%), a loss of balance (5%), agitation or confusion (4%) and not using a mobility aid (3%).

Conclusions

Attention needs to be given to the specific needs of recently admitted residents. As many falls were not witnessed, information was not always available to assist in preventing future falls. Fall reports indicated that many events were preventable and were due to environmental or management issues.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

Occupational therapists are a key resource to work with nursing staff to address the factors that contribute to injuries and improve the quality of life for residents.