

# Multidisciplinary Fall Management

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A comprehensive, facility-wide fall prevention program balances residents' autonomy with a facility's responsibility to meet regulations.

First, collect and review incident reports, noting the times and locations of all the falls. Look for commonalities and patterns to identify the root causes of incidents. Then, assemble a team of staff from all departments to champion your fall prevention efforts. Since the causes of falls are varied and complex, each department's participation is critical.

## DEPARTMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Consider some simple, practical steps for each department:

- Nursing staff is normally responsible for investigation and care planning. Using a clinical evaluation form and rating scale, assign a nurse to assess new residents for fall risk within 24 to 48 hours of admission and upon significant change in physical condition or cognitive status.

- Review the continence protocol and develop a toileting schedule or bladder training as appropriate.

- Evaluate residents' cognitive ability and safety awareness. Demonstrate call bell use and explain the importance of calling for help. Emphasize to all staff members the importance of answering call bells promptly. Encourage aides to build relationships with residents and know their personal habits.

- Check residents' medication regimens with a consultant pharmacist and work with the physician to discontinue or decrease dosage or number of medications. Educate staff on the side effects of drugs, and plan care interventions by arranging appropriate staffing and providing environmental assessment and needed support.

- Pain assessment and management are especially important for non-verbal residents or those with decline in cognitive abilities. Many residents with dementia become agitated, shift in bed, pace or make sudden movements when uncomfortable or in pain.

- Provide proper foot care to residents. Well-fitting clothes and footwear will significantly decrease the risk of falling. Shoes need to have a good tread and fit properly. Velcro fasteners are normally easier for the residents to manage than laces.

- The rehab team should assess residents for balance and transfer abilities and recommend assistive or enabling devices.

- Well structured activity programs provide physical activity that supports muscle strength and encourages balance exercises. Various activities throughout the day keep



Most resident falls can be prevented, but staff must be in the right place at the right time. Tracking the time and date of events can reveal unique patterns in each resident's behavior. Then staff can design care plans with timely preventative measures that mitigate risk. —Stanley Healthcare Solutions, Lincoln, Neb.

residents engaged and prevent them from wandering.

- Consider extrinsic factors, including wet floors, poor lighting, lack of necessary assistive devices and clutter. Get a therapist to properly fit wheelchairs, geri chairs, recliners and beds to residents' needs.

- Ensure residents are well nourished and hydrated. Lack of nutrition is frequently linked to weakness, fatigue and confusion. Dehydration can add dizziness to the mix.

- Consult your medical supplies vendor about new products that would help with fall prevention, such as anti-slip socks and footwear, hi-lo beds, mattresses and innovative walkers. There are a wide range of bed, chair and toilet alarms; make sure they are used appropriately and maintained properly. Remember that alarms can't prevent falls, but rather they notify staff that help is needed.

## WHEN FALLS OCCUR

When falls happen, evaluate the causes and contributing factors. Implement a fall management investigation that documents results of a physical assessment and serves as a reporting mechanism for tracking falls within your facility. Schedule multidisciplinary team meetings to analyze fall investigation and gain helpful perspective. Upon review, document your team's recommendations. Consider a communication mechanism for notifying staff at shift changes for 72 hours of recommended approaches or changes.

Protecting residents from preventable falls is imperative and should be an ongoing, constantly developing process. ■

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