STAR Project – An individualised, facilitated and sustainable approach to implementing the evidence in preventing falls in residential aged care facilities

Project overview
The purpose of the project was to successfully implement an evidence-based falls prevention project that reduced falls and falls-related injuries across nine residential care facilities from Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania.

The project was led by the National Ageing Research Institute (NARI) and supported by two research teams from the University of Tasmania and the University of Queensland.

What was done?
The project used the falls prevention evidence which was based on the Victorian Quality Council Guidelines (for hospitals and residential care settings) and the Australian Quality and Safety Council Guidelines – Preventing Falls and Harm from Falls in Older People, Resource suite for Australian hospitals and Residential Aged Care Facilities 2005. The project used an action research approach to support the implementation of the above evidence.

The project included the following key activities:
- A falls scoping audit was conducted at baseline and following implementation of activities.
- An education resource was developed – Falls Prevention Training Expo. The training package provides information and resources to run an interactive and experiential style training expo. The training aimed to raise the profile of falls prevention, with the motto, ‘falls prevention is everyone’s responsibility’. The resource provided individual session guidelines covering the following topics:
  - Medicines (including side effects);
  - Transfers and mobility;
  - Nutrition;
  - Environmental considerations;
  - Feet and footwear; and
  - Psycho-social considerations (including fear of falling).
- Each facility hosted a training expo. This process not only maximised the reach of falls prevention training to as many staff within each facility as possible, but the falls prevention training resource was also available for longer term use.

What was achieved?
What was the impact for residents?
Improvements in fall prevention practice were identified at all facilities with residents benefiting from:
- improvements in staff training in relation to falls prevention;
- use of hip protectors and high-low and low-low beds;
- use of bed and chair alarms;
- increased observation;
- increased use of Vitamin D and calcium supplementation;
- increased sunlight exposure;
- increased information for residents;
- increased access to allied health and medical support;
- improvements in falls risk assessments;
- improvements in foot care and appropriate footwear;
- increased identification of high falls risk residents; and
- increased environmental auditing and monitoring of sensory aids.

What was the impact for staff?
- Staff surveys on safety culture, sustainability and professional practice showed improvements in staff perceptions of the culture of the facility in relation to falls prevention activities and safety.
- The project team concluded that the use of action research was a beneficial process for engaging a broad mix of staff in facilities, facilitating reflection on practice, developing a best practice approach to falls prevention and supporting ‘buy in’ and staff ownership of innovation.
What could be adopted in my service?
Examples of small changes that facilities could make to have a positive impact on falls prevention and management include:

- Regularly review residents’ sensory aids (hearing and sight).
- Review current resident footwear and consider developing a system for purchasing appropriate footwear for residents.
- Provide residents with vitamin D and calcium supplements.
- Consider how increased use of physiotherapy and individual or group exercise programs might assist in preventing falls, particularly for at-risk residents.
- Consider increased use of hip protectors, high-low and low-low beds and alarms.
- Review falls risk assessment practice for individual residents (e.g. falls risk, mobility, etc) and for facilities (e.g. environmental falls risk factors).
- Review processes for identification and observation of high falls risk residents.
- Review the falls prevention information provided to residents.

What resources are available?
The Project website http://www.mednwh.unimelb.edu.au contains a number of resources developed through this project including:

- The Working Together to Prevent Falls in Residential Care – Resource Package. This resource provides a guide to implementing falls prevention interventions in a simple to use package with links to various resources such as:
  - Information on how to use falls incident data and how to define a fall;
  - Evidence based guidelines;
  - The falls risk assessment tool used in this project;
  - The scoping audit tool modified for use during the project for facilities to monitor their practice against evidence based guidelines;
  - A guide to action research; and
  - A guide to implementing an interactive falls prevention expo.

The website also contains an educational training package the Falls Prevention Training Expo which provides information and resources to run an interactive and experiential style training expo. It is designed for use in the acute, community and residential care sectors.

Where can I get more information?
For further information regarding this and other Round 1 EBPAC projects see the Department of Health and Ageing website at http://www.health.gov.au/ebpac

In addition, the Preventing Falls and Harm From Falls in Older People: Best Practice Guidelines for Australian Residential Aged Care Facilities 2009, have been designed to assist residential aged care facilities and health professionals working in facilities reduce the risk of falling for older residents. They replace the 2005 guidelines used in this project and contain the latest evidence on falls prevention. The guidelines can be found at: http://www.health.gov.au/internet/safety/publishing.nsf/content/FallsGuidelines-AustRACF