

Unintentional Falls

BACKGROUND

National

Unintentional fall-related death rates among older adults have risen significantly over the past few decades in the United States. In 2004, over 80% of fall-related fatalities were among persons 75 years of age and older. The following year, approximately 16,000 persons 65 years of age and older died from fall-related injuries, and nearly two million were treated in emergency departments. Men have a higher fatality rate than women as a result of a fall, while women are more likely than men to have a nonfatal injury. In the United States, one in three adults 65 years of age and older fall each year. Twenty percent to 30% of older adults who fall suffer moderate to severe injuries, including bruising, hip fractures, head injuries.¹

Among children birth to 19 years of age, falls are the leading cause of non-fatal injury. Nearly 2.8 million children are treated in hospital emergency rooms for fall-related injuries in the United States each year – approximately 8,000 every day.²

Oklahoma

Oklahoma has had increasingly high rates of fall-related injuries. The risk of injury increases with age, particularly for persons 65 years of age and older. Falls are the leading cause of injury death for persons 65 years of age and older in Oklahoma. From 2004 to 2006, 223 Oklahomans died each year as the result of an unintentional fall. The majority of deaths were among males (54%). Seventy-five percent of unintentional fall-related deaths occurred among persons 65 years of age and older. Fall-related fatalities among children and adolescents were less common, accounting for 2% of the total deaths.

There were approximately 8,900 fall-related hospitalizations each year, and hospitalizations increased 11% between 2004 and 2006. Seventy-two percent of hospitalizations were among those 65 years of age and older. Females 55 years of age and older had higher hospitalization rates associated with fall injuries than males (two times higher than males).³

PROGRESS

Funding

Currently, the Injury Prevention Service (IPS) does not receive specific funding for fall prevention activities.

Publications

Peer-Reviewed Publications

- Epidemiology of severe traumatic brain injury among persons 65 years of age and older in Oklahoma, 1992-2003. *Brain Injury* June 2007;21(7):691-9.
- Spinal cord injuries due to falls from hunting tree stands in Oklahoma, 1988-1999. *Journal of the Oklahoma State Medical Association* 2004;97(4):154-157.

Other Publications

- *Profile of Fall-Related Injuries in Oklahoma, 2006*

Summary Data Reports

- Epidemiology of Falls and Falls-Related Injuries Among Persons 65 Years and Older, Oklahoma, 2006
- Injuries in Oklahoma, 2004
- Injuries in Oklahoma, 2005
- Injuries in Oklahoma, 2004-2006

- Profile of Fall-Related Injuries in Oklahoma, 2003

Injury Update Reports

- Fall-Related Traumatic Brain Injuries among Oklahomans 65 Years and Older, 2005
- Traumatic Brain Injuries Resulting from Falls on Stairs/Steps in Oklahoma, 1992-2003
- Fall-related Traumatic Brain Injuries among Adults 65 Years of Age and Older, Oklahoma, 1992-2003

Fact Sheets

- Children's Safety Sheets
- Fall Prevention for Older Adults
- Fall Prevention for Young Children

Education and Planning Materials

- Injury Prevention Works: Strategies for Building Safe Communities

Collaboration

Using data from the epidemiologic profiles, a review of literature, and publications from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the State and Territorial Injury Prevention Directors Association (STIPDA), the Injury Prevention Service (IPS) is assessing and promoting projects to reduce falls among persons 65 years of age and older. The IPS will continue to collaborate with agencies to disseminate information on the risks and prevention of falls among older adults.

In 2009, the IPS worked with the Pottawatomie County Health Department to identify elderly falls as one of the leading causes of injury in the City of Shawnee, Oklahoma. The IPS will continue to work with this community to identify, implement, and/or evaluate fall prevention programs in the community as a component of the Safe Communities America project. Detailed data are being collected on fall-related hospitalizations for Shawnee residents 65 years of age and older. Nationally, a number of strategies are in place to help reduce falls, such as risk assessments and both focused and multifactor interventions. The

IPS has provided assistance to the Pottawatomie County Health Department and other community partners to review these strategies and determine which interventions will best meet the needs of the older adult population in Shawnee. The IPS will continue to collaborate with community agencies/organizations to develop and/or evaluate fall prevention programs for older adults. Similar fall prevention projects will be expanded to include other communities.

The IPS plans to sponsor a symposium on fall prevention among older adults, 65 years of age and older in the Spring of 2010. The anticipated target audience for the symposium includes county health departments, senior centers, community centers, faith-based organizations, Turning Point partners, Mobile Meals/Meals on Wheels, physicians, American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), Areawide Aging and district Area Agencies on Aging, additional community organizations that work closely with persons 65 years of age and older, and other interested audiences.

GOALS/OBJECTIVES

Goal

- Collect relevant data and provide educational information to reduce fall-related injuries and deaths.

Objective

- Reduce unintentional fall-related injury deaths among persons 65 years of age and older by 10% by 2015.
Baseline: 2006 CDC WISQARS data for Oklahoma: falls among persons 65 years of age and older=39.23 per 100,000 population.

ACTION PLAN

- Prepare and disseminate fact sheets, data reports, and news releases as appropriate through 2015.
- Disseminate fall-related information to county health departments, senior centers, faith-based organizations, Turning Point partners, community programs such as Mobile Meals, physicians, and other identified interested and appropriate audiences through 2015.
- Collect fall-related injury and death data through 2015.
- Sponsor a symposium on fall prevention among older adults, 65 years of age and older by 2010.
- Continue to support the City of Shawnee, Oklahoma with fall prevention efforts and expand efforts to other communities through 2015.

REFERENCES

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Falls Among Older Adults: An Overview. Retrieved 1 October 2009, from: <http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/adultfalls.html>.

²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Protect the Ones You Love: Falls. Retrieved 1 October 2009, from: <http://www.cdc.gov/SafeChild/Falls/default.htm>.

³Injury Prevention Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health. Injuries in Oklahoma, 2004-2006.