

Falls Injury Prevention in Heartland Communities

Even prior to falls injury prevention being recognized as a required organizational practice it was an issue being addressed by Heartland teams across the region. The prevalence of falls sustained by seniors is a serious concern in Heartland where more than 18% of the population is over 65 years of age.

It is estimated that 1 in 3 seniors is likely to fall at least once every year. These incidents impact the individual who sustained the fall, those close to them and the health system in multiple ways. There may be a personal economic cost to the individual with the need for additional assistive devices and costly upgrades to their homes. The cost to the health system is estimated to be \$56 million dollars annually. The psychological impact is just as significant. Twenty-five percent of seniors who have sustained a fall report they limit their daily activities for fear of falling again. This leads to social isolation, reduced quality of life and a decrease in health. A decrease in independence commonly occurs, which not only greatly affects the individual but also their caregivers. Family is often called upon to provide more assistance, placing extra strain on them as well.

Studies have shown that falls most often occur in or around the home. Therefore, a number of initiatives and actions have been taken at the community level in Heartland to help reduce the incidents of seniors' falls. These include:

- Conducting risk assessments at flu clinics;
- Hosting a falls prevention informational workshop for community members, HHR staff and management;
- Participation on the Saskatchewan Falls Injury Prevention Strategy Steering Committee;
- Organization of Seniors on the Move Falls Injury Prevention Clinics in Rosetown, Biggar and Eatonia. The clinics offered falls risk assessments and developed holistic, individualized falls prevention plans for each attendee;
- Developed the 'Seniors on the Move...Stay Fit, Stay Safe' educational classes. This program is geared towards a seniors audience and is provided by the Therapy staff;
- Set up booths at local trade shows and health fairs to highlight falls risks and prevention strategies that can be incorporated into seniors' daily routines;
- In the process of creating falls injury prevention kits through funding from the SGI Community Grant. These four kits will be housed at the Therapy offices throughout the region. They will contain high risk and safety items that falls prevention advocates can use to inform more seniors of risk factors and provide practical recommendations to be used in their daily lives to prevent falls and resulting injuries;
- An exercise program is being piloted at a senior housing complex in Rosetown. It is hoped it will be expanded to other communities in the region;
- Development of seniors falls prevention brochures as well as ones to promote the culture of safety at any age;
- Held informational sessions for seniors in Unity, Wilkie and Macklin; and
- Participation in the Heartland Falls Reduction Steering Committee to better coordinate falls prevention in all areas of service (Acute, Long-Term Care, Home Care and Community).

Even though many activities have already been started to reduce seniors' falls, there is still much to do. If you would like to assist with falls prevention at the community level, please contact your local Therapies department or Crystal Storey, Population Health Promotion Coordinator, at 882-6413 ext 237 or crystal.storey@hrha.sk.ca.