National Fall Prevention Workshop: stepping up pan-Canadian coordination

Centre for Health Promotion, Public Health Agency of Canada; British Columbia Injury Research and Prevention Unit (BCIRPU)

Background

About one in three Canadian seniors will experience a fall at least once each year.\textsuperscript{1-4} Such falls are the leading cause of injury-related hospitalizations among older people.\textsuperscript{1} Apart from causing injury, falls can result in chronic pain, reduced quality of life and, in severe cases, death. Psychological effects of a fall may cause a post-fall syndrome that includes dependence on others for daily activities, loss of autonomy, confusion, immobilization and depression.\textsuperscript{1}

Falls and the resulting injuries often occur due to a combination of factors, including health conditions associated with aging such as vision problems, osteoporosis, dementia and symptoms of a chronic disease. They can be due to the side effects of medications, environmental hazards and risk-taking behaviours.

Fall prevention initiatives and strategies are taking place in all provinces and territories and at the national level. To enhance the collaborative understanding of these initiatives, a National Fall Prevention Workshop was held at the Canadian Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, on 17 November 2011. The Workshop was co-hosted by the British Columbia Injury Research and Prevention Unit (BCIRPU) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). Fall prevention leads from each province and territory were invited to present their most recent activities and their plans. This event proved to be highly successful with over 60 attendees representing all the provinces and Yukon (see Table 1).

Workshop objectives

The objectives of the 2011 National Fall Prevention Workshop were to 1) bring together federal, provincial and territorial leads interested in collaborating on evidence-based, clinically relevant programming, policy and practice to reduce the risk of falls and related injuries among older adults in Canada; 2) present model strategic fall prevention plan components from each province/territory; 3) discuss current best practices and their application in each province and territory, including data standardization for fall-related morbidity, fall risk assessment tools and protocols, implementation of best practices and evaluation of progress and outcomes.

Summary of workshop discussions

Education and training

Education of health care providers was identified as a priority, with the Canadian Fall Prevention Curriculum (CFPC) cited by most participants as the training program of choice. Standardizing and integrating fall prevention training into postsecondary education was considered an important next step.

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Accreditation

Canada’s Required Organizational Practices for fall prevention was frequently cited as the impetus for developing fall prevention strategies in health care settings.6

Leadership and strategic planning

Many attendees identified that while work on fall prevention is ongoing in parts of their jurisdictions, there is no consistency across their province or territory. Some participants recommended developing a sustainable, evidence-based fall prevention strategy with feasible solutions to facilitate a coordinated approach; however, it was noted that fiscal considerations were a limiting factor to implementing such initiatives.

Team communication

Networks and coalitions were frequently referred to as an important medium for professionals to communicate about implementing fall prevention programming.

Data and surveillance

Jurisdictions that reported having access to data were able to demonstrate a positive relationship between their fall prevention programs and a reduction in falls and fall-related injuries. Several jurisdictions reported that lack of data and surveillance at the setting and at provincial/territorial level made it difficult to evaluate programs rigorously.

Next steps

The 2011 National Fall Prevention Workshop introduced the idea of a National Fall Prevention Collaborative composed of the provincial and territorial leads who presented at the workshop, with the potential for other interested stakeholders to participate. The presenters all agreed to build on the momentum from the workshop to formally establish a practice network and virtual library of best/promising practices. In the interests of further collaboration—and building on the success of the workshop—participants recommended a larger-scale national conference on fall prevention initiatives.

Acknowledgements

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References