



SENIORS AT RISK:

DESIGNING THE SYSTEM TO PROTECT AMERICA'S MOST VULNERABLE CITIZENS FROM MEDICATION-RELATED PROBLEMS

WHAT WILL ONE OF EVERY THREE SENIORS SUFFER THIS YEAR?

A Fall

- More than 11 million seniors—one of every three—will fall this year (Sattin 1992; Tinetti, Speechley, and Ginter 1988), and approximately one in 10 of those falls will result in a serious injury such as hip fracture or head injury (Tinetti 2003). More than 500,000 seniors will suffer hip fractures annually by 2040 (Cummings, Rubin, and Black 1990).
- Each year, 35% to 40% of generally healthy seniors living in the community fall (Campbell, Spears, and Borrie 1990). Because nursing facility residents are older, more frail, and more cognitively impaired, approximately 50% fall each year (Rubinstein, Josephson, and Robbins 1994).
- About 20% of hip fracture patients will die within five years of the fracture (Cooper 1997), yet thousands of those deaths are **PREVENTABLE**.
- Most people do not realize that falls can be a medication-related problem.
- Risk factors for falls include medication use, advanced age, decreased mobility and strength, balance impairment, neurological disease, cardiovascular disease, incontinence, visual impairment, and cognitive impairment.
- Certain medications—such as high blood pressure medications, antidepressants, sleep aids, antiseizure medications, and heart antiarrhythmic medications—can contribute to falls in the elderly for a variety of different reasons. Perhaps a drug causes dizziness in an elderly patient, and that patient has not been properly instructed on how to rise and walk while on the medication. Standing up too quickly could result in a fall. Or, perhaps a drug causes frequent urination, and a patient constantly gets up during the night. One of those bathroom trips could cause a fall, and possibly a hip fracture.

“No risk factor for falls is as potentially preventable or reversible as medication use.”

(Leipzig, Cumming, and Tinetti 1999)

Medication-related falls and hip fractures are preventable

- Consultant pharmacists can assess seniors' drug regimens for exposure to risks that may contribute to falls, recommend drug therapy changes, and educate the patient and caregiver on how to avoid dangerous situations. Medication management is an effective fall prevention measure (Cooper 1997).

What will one of every three seniors suffer this year?—A FALL

References

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