



IN TOUCH

HOSPICE OF THE VALLEY DEMENTIA NEWSLETTER

MAY 2008

Fall Prevention in Persons with Dementia

About half of persons with dementia fall each year – an alarming statistic considering the consequences.

These individuals are three times more likely to sustain a fracture. Half of the elderly with advanced dementia who sustain a hip fracture die within six months. Falls are one of the top three risk factors for nursing home placement.

How do we determine who is at greatest risk of falling?

Risk factors include altered gait or balance; sleep changes (poor sleep or sedating medications); generalized weakness; visual changes; communication difficulties; acute illness (especially delirium); medication use and a history of falls.

Put yourself in the position of a person with advanced dementia. Think about sitting in a chair all day, feeling bored and restless. Your body aches from being in the same position, but you can't express yourself. So you rock back and forth and say "help," but caregivers don't respond. Fed up, you propel yourself out of the chair and land on the floor.

Hospice of the Valley's Dementia Program wants to change that scenario by training caregivers to anticipate the dementia patient's needs. Give the person with dementia a comfortable padded chair that supports the body, and reposition them often. Put eyeglasses within reach, offer preferred foods and beverages and provide toileting assistance. Make time for a walk outside every day, and keep pain under control.



Brief periods of assisted walking may prevent or minimize falls.

Here are more tips for enhancing comfort:

- Avoid the use of restraints and bedrails.
- Routinely assess medications and sit/stand/walk capability.
- Make sure patients wear appropriate footwear.
- Monitor for effective pain control.
- Anticipate basic needs.
- Remember the "need to move" and help the patient walk or move.
- Educate family and caregivers about the advancing disease process and fall risks.

Environmental changes also can help. Increase lighting; decrease clutter; remove throw rugs; use contrasting colors to make items stand out, such as a red toilet seat on white porcelain; and keep furnishings at appropriate height for easier transfers.



Providing pleasurable distraction—like blowing bubbles—can help a restless patient feel more comfortable.

Please contact Hospice of the Valley's Dementia Program for more information: 602.636.6363.



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