The Preventing Falls with Injuries Project

Goal
To prevent falls that result in injury to patients in health care facilities.

References

3 Fischer, I., Krauss, M., Dunagan, W., Birge, S., Hitcho, E., Johnson, S., Fraser, V. (2005). Patterns and predictors of inpatient falls and fall-related injuries in a large academic hospital. Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology, 26(10), 822-827

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The problem
Despite long term and widespread attention to fall prevention among the hospitals participating in this project, patients under their care continue to fall, and many of these falls result in injury. Their experience is not unusual. Falls have been identified by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) as an event that is preventable and should never occur. CMS has also identified “falls and trauma” on its list of Hospital Acquired Conditions (HAC) for which reimbursement will be limited, specifically for falls that result in fractures, dislocations and intracranial injuries. Approximately 11,000 fatal falls occur in the hospital annually,¹ and approximately 35 percent of patients who fall sustain an injury.²–⁶ These injuries result in an additional 6.3 hospital days.⁷ The cost of a serious fall with injury is about $14,056.⁸–⁹

Addressing the problem
In November 2011, the Center for Transforming Healthcare launched its seventh project with seven leading hospitals and health system. The reason why a patient falls and is injured is often multifactorial, from medication to environmental factors. To ensure the most robust solutions possible, the project team worked to prevent falls with injuries by identifying specific causes within their individual organizations, as well as the causes that were common across the collaborative.

The participating organizations used a systematic process improvement method – called Robust Process Improvement® (RPI®) – to identify the targeted solutions. RPI® is a fact-based, systematic, and data-driven problem-solving methodology. It incorporates tools and concepts from Lean Six Sigma and change management methodologies. Using RPI®, the project teams measure the magnitude of the problem, pinpoint the contributing causes, develop specific solutions that are targeted to each cause, and thoroughly test the solutions in real life situations.

Results
New measurement systems and solutions from the Center’s Preventing Falls with Injury project were able to reduce the rate of patient falls by 35 percent, and the rate of patients injured in a fall by 62 percent. For a typical 200-bed hospital, this translates to a reduction in the number of patients injured in a fall from 117 to 45, saving approximately $1 million annually.

Access solutions
Joint Commission accredited organizations can experience the same success as Center participants in preventing falls starting in fall 2015, when the Center’s Preventing Falls Targeted Solutions Tool® (TST®) becomes available. The TST is a unique online application that guides organizations in accurately measuring performance, identifying unique barriers, and implementing proven solutions.