

Fall Prevention in the North Shore

Falls are a leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries for older adults in the United States and in Wisconsin. For the Wisconsin communities in the North Shore, falls are the primary cause of injury-related emergency department visits and inpatient admissions. People often perceive falls as an evitable part of the aging process. Research over the past decade, however, has demonstrated there are things that people can do to prevent a fall. Healthcare providers and older adults can work together to address modifiable risk factors like lower body weakness, difficulties with gait and balance, use of psychoactive medications, poor vision, and home hazards.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a guide for community-based organizations, including local health departments, interested in implementing evidence-based fall prevention programs.¹ This guide, along with the compendium of evidence-based programs, help organization chose and implement fall prevention programs and initiatives based on their organizational goals and individual client needs. A new study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine supports the unique role of emergency medical service personnel in addressing fall risk factors and referring older adults to fall prevention programs and services.² The authors highlight that EMS providers, as part of a community paramedicine or mobile integrated health program, can provide fall risk assessments and fall prevention education information. This can be particularly helpful for the large number of EMS calls that don't result in a transport to an emergency department.

North Shore Fire/Rescue (NSFR) and the North Shore Health Department (NSHD) have several fall prevention initiatives in the North Shore. Some initiatives, like Remembering When, are community programs directed at groups of older adults in the community. Other fall prevention initiatives, like home assessments are services for individuals who request them directly or are identified as needing an assessment because of repeated 911 calls or a request/referral from another agency like the Milwaukee County Department on Aging. Our community-based and individual fall prevention programs are summarized below.

Community-Based Fall Prevention Programs:

Remembering When: *Remembering When: A Fire and Fall Prevention Program for Older Adults* was developed by

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and CDC to help older adults live safely at home for as long as possible. In June of 2014, North Shore Fire Rescue (NSFR) and the North Shore Health Department (NSHD) applied and received a grant through the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) to implement the program in the North Shore.



Remembering When is centered around 16 key safety messages – eight fire prevention and eight fall prevention - developed by experts from national and local safety organizations as well as through focus group testing in high fire-risk states. The program was designed to be implemented by a coalition comprising of the local fire department, service clubs, social and religious organizations, retirement communities, and others. Coalition members can decide how to best approach the local senior population: through group presentations, during home visits, and/or as part of a smoke alarm installation and fall intervention program.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Preventing Falls: A Guide to Implementing Effective Community-Based Fall Prevention Programs*, 2nd edition, 2015: Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/community_preventfalls.html.
2. Faul, M., Stevens, J.A., Sasser, S.M., Alee, L., Deokar, A. J., Kuhls, D.A., Burke, P.A. **Older Adult Falls Seen by Emergency Medical Service Providers.** *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. In press, published online: February 3rd, 2016.

To date, the NSHD and NSFR have jointly presented Remembering When to 12 senior groups with a total of 221 older adult participants.

In August of 2014, Walmart in Brown Deer awarded NSFR a \$2,000 community grant to further support the Remembering When program. The additional funding allowed NSFR to purchase smoke alarms so they could be provided free of charge to residents with inadequate or non-functioning smoke alarms.

Community Fall Risk Assessments: The NSHD is partnering with Concordia University of Wisconsin's School of Pharmacy on the development of a medication information guide and medication risk assessment sheet. These materials will outline the ways medications can contribute to a fall and provide information on the types of medications that increase fall risk. Pharmacy students will also participate in several senior health fairs in 2016 to review medications to determine potential fall risk. At these health fairs, public health nurses will also conduct blood pressure screenings, Timed Up and Go tests to assess mobility risk, and provide education about their individual fall risk factors, using an algorithm developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in their STEADI (Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths and Injuries) toolkit.

Individual-Based Fall Prevention Programs:

Home Assessments: NSFR has a program to follow up with all of our residents that have experienced a fall and offer a home assessment in an effort to avoid repeat falls. Funding from a National Fire Protection Association's Rolf Jensen grant helped to expand the number of home assessments in 2015. The goal was to complete 125 home assessments, which the department exceeded by completing 160 home assessments last year. As part of the home assessment, providers ensure that the resident has working smoke alarms on every level of their home and convey the importance of escape planning. Additionally, the personnel conducting the assessment identify potential vulnerabilities in the home that may increase the risk for falls. At the conclusion of the assessment, each resident is provided an information packet highlighting the fire safety and fall prevention tips covered during the assessment, as well as a comprehensive checklist that identifies the concerns identified during the assessment. To date, NSFR has conducted over 200 home assessments and has installed 294 smoke alarms. The data collected during the assessments has revealed that 94% of the homes have not been properly equipped with smoke alarms. Below is a link to a story done by TMJ 4 about this program. <https://youtu.be/Z4XxVKhg8Oc>

Referral Program: When fall risks and other health risk concerns are noted during the course of a home visit or response to a 911 call, NSFR and NSHD jointly identify possible resources available to the resident and offer follow up by phone or home visits in an effort to improve the resident's access to improved health and safety. Fall risk concerns and prevention strategies are often highlighted during these visits.

Mobile Integrated Health: All emergency calls for service related to falls are reviewed by Fire Department personnel. A comprehensive list is then provided to the NSFR's home assessor. The assessor then attempts contact by phone to follow up with the patient and check on their well-being. During this follow-up call, the patient and/or their family are offered the ability to schedule an assessment. As part of this process, Community Paramedic trained fire department personnel communicate with the assessor to determine if additional services or intervention may be necessary. If so, the Community Paramedic works with the staff at the North Shore Health Department to provide additional healthcare related resources to ensure the patient has access to comprehensive healthcare.

The combined resources and expertise of NSFR and the NSHD has resulted in a partnership available to all residents of the North Shore. Programs already in place for fall prevention and risk assessment for older adults have the potential to make a significant impact on the health of individuals in the community.