



## Bermuda Hospitals Board

### Know Your BHB: Preventing Falls

By Preston Swan, Vice President of Quality & Risk Management,  
with the support of the BHB Falls Prevention Committee

Hospitals and long term care facilities are meant to be safe. So what goes wrong when a patient or resident ends up getting injured because they fall? Shouldn't there be zero falls?

Unfortunately, while 'zero falls' is always the goal, it is impossible to achieve. Even when there is a clean, clutter-free environment with handrails and strong falls prevention programmes that assess, monitor and safeguard patients, some falls still occur. An unsteady inpatient may decide to get out of bed without calling for help; a senior might simply lose his or her balance while walking to a physiotherapy appointment. In the community, one-third of people 65 and older will fall at least once a year, and this increases to half for those aged 80 and older.

But while some falls cannot be prevented, in a healthcare environment it is important to monitor and assess all falls to make sure that everything that can prevent an incident is being done.

Monitoring falls and investigating why they happen is how healthcare organisations seek to improve patient safety. Publicizing results is how they can be held accountable. This is why BHB is including two falls figures – total falls, and falls with injuries – to help you better 'Know Your BHB'. This is just one of our quality and satisfaction indicators we are sharing with the community as we move through 2016.

BHB has three programmes – for children, inpatients and outpatients – that seek to assess and identify risk, then support patients with appropriate safeguards and therapies. There is also an outpatient group called the 'Staying Steady Group' in the KEMH Day Hospital to help vulnerable individuals avoid falling at home.

What increases your risk of falling? Age is a major factor. Detectable gait abnormalities increase the risk of falling, and affect 20% to 40% of individuals aged 65 and older and 40% to 50% of those aged 85 and older. Other factors that increase your risk include being unwell, injured, frail, unsteady, on medications such as anti-depressants and sedatives, and having poor sight or cognitive impairments, including dementia or mental illness. The more factors you have, the higher your risk of falling.

Unfortunately, people with physical frailties are more likely to fall and more likely to be hurt. Having less strength to break your fall means a higher likelihood of a head injury; seniors with more fragile bones are more likely to experience a fracture or break. Accidents are the fifth leading cause of death in older adults, with falls accounting for two-thirds of these deaths.

Preventing falls is therefore incredibly important to patient populations. A Falls Prevention Committee with staff from across BHB services and locations meets every month, to assess data, discuss contributing factors, and possible recommendations staff can implement. The committee also looks at how we can increase the awareness of falls prevention through educational forums.

The number of total falls and falls with injuries experienced by individuals in all BHB locations and services are listed below for the last four fiscal years. But how do you know whether this is a good or a bad figure? There is no international benchmark BHB can compare to. However, to put this number in the context, in 2015/16 BHB had more than 36,000 Emergency and Urgent Care Centre visits, tens of thousands of outpatients in all its facilities, over 6,000 inpatients and hundreds of residents in long-term or group home facilities. During that year, from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016, BHB had a total of 185 falls, and 47 of those resulted in an injury of some kind. The vast majority of injuries were minor.

For general information around falls data, you can visit the US Government Department of Health & Human Services' Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality website:

<http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/systems/hospital/fallpxtoolkit/fallpxtk5.html>

Fiscal Year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
<b>Total falls (including those with injuries)</b>	254	244	171	185
<b>Total falls with injury</b>	46	33	27	47

