

10th International Conference on

Clinical & Experimental Ophthalmology

November 21-23, 2016 Dubai, UAE

Recognizing the association between visual loss and hospital falls: A risk reduction initiative

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Problem: Across Europe, patient falls in hospital account for 1.5% of gross healthcare expenditure. The multiple consequences of this significantly increase patient morbidity and mortality. This study, in a large regional hospital, assesses what proportion of inpatients, who have suffered a fall, have visual loss; what degree of this can be termed as visual impairment and what percentage of falls had either of these documented in their medical notes.

Methodology: Manual, 4-month retrospective data collection across 9 medical wards.

Findings: 93 patients had documented falls. 72% of the sample had low vision or worse when assessed against the International Council of Ophthalmology Visual Standards. 81% were 65 years or older and 95% of these had low vision or worse. Of the 72% inpatients that had this visual impairment, only 2 cases had documentation of this in their medical notes (2%). This lack of documentation of visual problems in hospital notes is a significant limitation in identifying patients vulnerable to falling and impedes risk reduction of future falls. The United Kingdom National Audit of Inpatient Falls 2015 recommends that all patients 65 years or older must be assessed for visual impairment and have this taken into account in their management, highlighting the shortcomings that this study has identified.

Conclusion: To limit cost secondary to this preventable phenomenon, this investigation recommends that all hospital-admission pro forma prompt consideration of visual impairment in each patient, especially those 65 years or older; post-fall, all cases must be reviewed by a physician and include assessment of the patient's level of functional vision if required with subsequent action thereafter; visual impairment to be considered for every patient as standard in nurse-led inter-ward handover. This is advised for all major hospitals where a reduction in falls is targeted and increased awareness warranted, aiming for improved patient outcomes.

Biography

Magnus Theodorsson is a Foundation Year 2 Doctor working in Hillingdon Hospital, London. He has special interest in ophthalmology and pursuing Specialty training in the field.

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