

Hip Protectors reduce fractures in Burnaby Hospital

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by Michael Bernard

Fraser Health's expert on falls prevention says a lot of teamwork — and a little padding in the right place – has helped Burnaby Hospital cut in-hospital hip fractures suffered by seniors by a whopping 80% over the last four years.



One in about 1,000 seniors admitted to hospital in Canada each year fractures a hip during their stay, said Fabio Feldman, Fraser Health's Manager of Seniors Falls and Injury Prevention.

Seniors fall for any number of reasons, ranging from being in a new environment or the effect of medications, to poor balance, lack of muscle strength or the medical reason for which they are hospitalized. When the fall leads to a fracture, the effect can be catastrophic. Many lose their mobility and independence, and about one in four will die within a year.

But Feldman made a startling find when he reviewed the incidence of hip fractures reported among seniors at Burnaby Hospital. The number has dropped from 14 in the 2003/04 fiscal year to three in 2006/07.

“Only two preventive strategies could account for this,” said Feldman. “almost all of in-hospital hip fractures are due to falls, so one factor is falls prevention, which involves educating staff, conducting safety checks and establishing standardized safety procedures. The other factor is the use of hip protectors.”

Dena Gartner, senior physiotherapist and section head for medicine at Burnaby Hospital, said a team approach to falls prevention has been a big factor in reducing falls. “We’ve had a multi-disciplinary team working on this for years,” she said. “Everyone is aware that many seniors are frail and at risk when they enter the hospital.”

Feldman is hoping to see the Burnaby experience repeated at other Fraser Health hospitals. Not only can hip protectors save lives, they can also save money. “We know that hospitalization following a hip fracture runs about \$18,000 a patient. If you do the math, conservatively speaking, that means that Burnaby staff has saved more than \$340,000 by following a falls prevention strategy and ensuring patients wear hip protectors. By comparison, the hospital has spent only \$5,000 so far purchasing hip protectors.”

For further information, contact Fabio Feldman at 604-519-8534

The hip protectors used at this acute care hospital are the HipSaver brand.