

Patient Safety Learning Advisory

Fall Resulting in Fracture

Summary:

A personal care home resident fell, resulting in fractures of the seventh and eighth ribs as well as a fractured right femur.

Staff initiated a bed alarm three weeks earlier following a fall. After this fall, the staff discovered that the bed alarm was not functioning and did not alert staff when the resident exited the bed.

If the bed alarm had alerted staff to the resident exiting the bed, the fall may have been preventable. Equipment malfunction contributed to the fall.

Keywords: bed alarm, fall, equipment failure

This review is based on a single event.

Findings of the Review:

The resident's gait had been deteriorating over time. A referral to occupational and physical therapy services for reassessment of mobility needs was not completed.

Following the fall, the resident complained of pain to their head, buttock, knee and leg. Staff assisted the resident to a sitting position on the bed. When the resident laid back on the bed, the staff heard a "snapping" sound while helping the resident lift legs up onto the bed. It is not known if the hip was broken prior to returning the resident to the bed. Current best practice is to immobilize a possible fracture and contact ambulance for transfer for further evaluation by a primary care practitioner.

It was noted that the batteries in the bed alarm were not functioning and that the alarm had been functioning inconsistently for a few days prior to this fall.

There is a lack of clarity about bed alarms, the indication for use, effectiveness, how to check batteries, when and how often to check alarms, and responsibility for preventative maintenance.

System Learning:

Review the Falls policy with staff, highlighting:

- The importance of timely referral to Therapy Services when a decline in client's status or increased falls is noted.
- Develop regional practice guidelines related to the use of bed alarms. Guidelines will include but not be limited to:

- a) Effectiveness of bed alarms in preventing falls
- b) Indications for use of bed alarms
- c) Contraindications of bed alarm use
- d) Preventative maintenance of bed alarms
- e) Direction related to how/when batteries are to be changed

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