

REDUCING INJURY FROM FALLS WITH A HOME SAFETY SURVEY

Linking safety assessment to medical assessment boosts access to a vulnerable population

Public Health Problem

- Falls are the number one cause of injury deaths among older adults. Every eighteen seconds an older adult is treated in a hospital emergency department for a fall.
- Over a four year period, more than 4,000 Pennsylvanians died as a result of fall-related injuries.
- Improving lighting and physical strength and reducing hazards at home can help older adults prevent injuries caused by a fall.

Program

- Most falls by older adults take place at home. Older adults with medical problems are particularly vulnerable.
- The Chester County Health Department contracts with Senior HealthLink, a division of Neighborhood Health Agencies, to do safety assessments in conjunction with the medical assessments they do for the underserved and uninsured population in the county. This allows the health department to reach a vulnerable population that they do not normally visit.
- Nursing students conduct in-home safety surveys developed by the health department. The students provide educational tips and information to older adults on how to review their medications for potential problems, increase their physical activity and mobility and reduce hazards in the environment that can increase the risk of falling.
- The health department educator also does safety surveys at low income housing complexes in the county not already being served by Senior HealthLink.

Impact

- Over 300 home safety assessments have been completed and fall prevention efforts have been enhanced with the provision of safety items such as flashlights, nightlights, pillboxes, bathmats, and slip-resistant kitchen and bathroom rugs as needed. Another four fall-risk assessments were provided at senior centers.
- Presentations and training sessions on fall prevention reached almost 400 participants with five presentations geared specifically to those with Alzheimer's disease.
- Exhibits and distribution of educational materials at several Senior Expos and an African American Wellness Expo reached over 800 participants.
- Senior HealthLink is recognized by the National Council on Aging in their *2007 Creative Practices in Home Safety Assessment and Modification Study* publication and the health department is acknowledged as a partner in this worthy effort.

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