Kaiser Permanente Fall Prevention: It Takes a Team and a Total Health Approach

Kaiser Permanente recognizes the high risk of falls in older adults, and the impact of falls on injuries, mobility and quality of life, and even early death.

Kaiser Permanente Northwest region’s innovative program to prevent falls leverages our integrated delivery system, multi-disciplinary teams, and community resources and partnerships. Leaders of the program highlight that it requires a team approach to support seniors, raise awareness, lower risk factors in the community and across the care continuum, and tailor interventions to boost confidence in avoiding falls.

Kaiser Permanente is committed to adapting the elements of this evidence-based program in our other service areas across the United States. We will also make these best practices available to all, because we believe they can be adapted by other community health systems and health plans to benefit even more people. We call this initiative our SELECT Team program:

SELECT Team: Elements for Success:
1. SCREEN — Understand evidence, screen and assess risk factors
2. EDUCATE — Educate, engage, provide referrals and supports
3. LEVERAGE — Leverage information across the care continuum
4. EVALUATE — Collect data, measure, and evaluate progress
5. CHAMPION — Leadership and “championship”
6. TEAM — Keep your team engaged and empowered for ongoing process improvement

Understand evidence, screen and assess risk factors
A standardized tool promotes a common understanding of high, medium, and low risk among care teams and external partners. Our SELECT Team uses the following tools:
1. The Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) evidence-based tool, STEADI, which offers consistent screening and decision support tailored to risk level.
2. Kaiser Permanente’s Total Health Assessment, which includes questions that can identify beneficiaries at higher risk for falls.
3. The Annual Wellness Visit is an opportunity to talk to the member, provide education and referrals, highlight fall prevention in a personal prevention plan, and engage members to identify their motivations for staying active.
4. Kaiser Permanente has developed tools using internal data and members’ health history to stratify members with complex conditions, including fall risk. These tools help assess risk and tailor outreach, education, and interventions accordingly. In inpatient settings, care teams are alerted by the EHR and trained to identify high risk patients and high risk activities and medications that contribute to falls.

Educate, engage, provide referrals and supports: internal and community partnerships
A range of evidence-based interventions can be appropriate, depending on individual risk and local resources. Education regarding home safety, high-risk medications, shoe wear, vision, strength and
balance, assistive devices, and appropriate vitamin D intake can be provided. Individual or group physical therapy sessions may be offered, or other group exercise and coaching that also adds a social dimension to boost confidence.

Preventing falls as our population ages requires partnership to raise awareness and reduce hazards. Current and potential champions include federal, state and local public health department campaigns and coordination efforts with health plans and providers, as well as community health and wellness resources, and participation of private sector entities such as shopping malls and retailers. For example, to promote balance and physical activity, Kaiser Permanente partners with local groups like Silver Sneakers, and offers Tai Chi classes in concert with community programs.

Leverage information across the care continuum

As members move from home to external hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and home health agencies, however, it can be a challenge to ensure information moves with them. Kaiser Permanente is working collaboratively on technology and care team solutions to this challenge. A securely shared electronic medical record enables our care teams to identify members on high-risk medications or who have had fall-related injuries or fractures, and target outreach and interventions as well as track outcomes. We continue to improve our electronic health tools to deliver useful information to our members on demand at our member portal, www.kp.org, and to our care teams so that timely and relevant resources are always available.

Collect data; measure, and evaluate progress

Kaiser Permanente collects a range of data to measure progress and inform our care delivery processes. We ask our members directly, through standardized surveys and direct engagement with care teams. We track older members who have had fractures, using registries, for example, for special outreach and monitoring. We can also look at the role falls play in emergency department visits or other acute episodes.

Leadership and “championship”

With a multitude of potential options available as a part of this team and total health-based approach, and no single clinical discipline accountable for all of it, Kaiser Permanente has found it important to support front-line “champions” to prioritize fall prevention and who may include pharmacists, podiatrists, orthopedists, nurses, social workers, primary care clinicians, physical therapists, health coaches, exercise instructors, and even data analysts.

Use your team for ongoing process improvement

It takes purposeful, integrated team work and clear, consistent communication practices to support and encourage members and patients to remain active, social, and safe. As patients age and their abilities and needs change, it is important to ensure that the multidisciplinary team that works together to deliver these services is empowered to modify and evolve the program elements, to strengthen and replicate what works, and adjust or replace what doesn’t.