

Senate Aging Committee Seeks Community Input on Falls Prevention

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On behalf of Argentum, which advocates for excellence in senior living, we thank you for reaching out for input on this very important topic impacting older Americans. This population is one of the nation's most valuable resources, but also one of the most vulnerable.

Argentum is the leading national association exclusively dedicated to supporting companies operating professionally managed, resident-centered senior living communities and the older adults and families they serve. Argentum member companies operate senior living communities offering assisted living, independent living, continuing care, and memory care services to older adults. Since 1990, Argentum has advocated for choice, independence, dignity and quality of life for all seniors.

Argentum has worked with the senior living industry in all states to advance industry standards and regulations to ensure that all senior living communities continue to provide high quality care and quality of life as well as appropriate supports and services to the diverse array of residents served, including the causes and challenges associated with fall detection and prevention.

Caring for a population that includes seniors who are at risk of falling offers many challenges, such as the need for ongoing communication and collaboration with health care providers, interventions and follow-up, needed resources such as tools to support seniors in their dwellings, adaptive equipment, modifications, reimbursement for technology that allows for earlier intervention, and preventative measures such as exercise and medication reviews.

The comments we are submitting reflect the services and supports that are provided in senior living communities. For background, the senior living industry is regulated in every state and falls must all be reported in accordance with state laws and regulations. Senior living offers an environment where resources are much closer at hand and staff routinely check on residents in their rooms in assisted living and memory care settings. Physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech language therapy, and social services can meet confidentially with residents in the privacy of their own rooms and receive services, or transportation can be arranged to drive residents to these services.

The need for these services is great both before and after falls, and the industry has many levels of intervention striving toward fall prevention. Routine exercise regimes are offered on a daily basis such as basic stretching, coordination,

strengthening, yoga, Tai Chi, outdoor activities, and interactive opportunities. Aqua aerobics is not out of the question when the senior living community has a pool.

Comprehensive assessments are performed on new residents, which highlights needs with basic activities of daily living such as bathing, grooming, dressing, and ambulation. Falls assessments are a part of the resident assessment. Ensuring appropriately fitted assistive devices, or the need for assistive devices, review of medications and their side effects, are all reviewed. Resident preferences for activities and interests they have had or want to have at the community are an important element to ensure the resident can live with quality of life.

This comprehensive information is then discussed and entered into a plan of care (individualized service plan) for the resident. This plan is updated every six months and or upon a change in condition.

All senior living residents should be able to preserve their independence and well-being while feeling secure with the proper safety measures. Thanks to collaborative partnerships between assisted living communities and health care professionals, there are many best practices in place to help residents age safely.

Recommendations

Argentum understands the seriousness of the circumstances of falls. Falls are the leading cause of fatal injury and the most common cause of non-fatal trauma-related hospital admissions among older adults. Falls result in more than 2.8 million injuries treated in emergency rooms annually, including over 800,000 hospitalizations and more than 27,000 deaths. In 2015, the total cost of fall injuries was \$50 billion. Medicare and Medicaid shouldered 75% of these costs. The impact on the older person's quality of life is equally as impactful. Compromised mobility typically means the older person cannot enjoy the life they once led, and it can lead to depression and an accelerated death.

Industry Standards

Argentum is currently working on a series of industry best practices including a falls detection and prevention initiative for the senior living industry. The initiative highlights the causes, investigation of, reporting requirements, post fall therapies, exercise, medication reviews, eye and hearing examinations, assistive devices, technology, and interventions for prevention. It is our intention to have a progressive falls intervention strategy to help focus on areas needing attention and help to foster a plan for prevention by 2020.



We sincerely appreciate your consideration of the following information provided by Argentum and its stakeholders and look forward to continuing dialogue with you to ensure that all of our nation's seniors are housed safely at all times in a caring, nurturing environment. Argentum is available to further address any of these issues by contacting Argentum president & CEO James Balda at jbalda@argentum.org or VP of Quality Improvement John Schulte at jschulte@argentum.org.

Technology

Technology is rapidly advancing and changing every part of our lives. It does and will continue to play a critical role in fall detection and prevention. Some considerations are as follows:

- The technology needs to fit the capabilities and needs of the individual resident. What works for an ambulatory resident might not work for someone in a wheelchair. Cognitively ability must also be considered when finding the correct technology to meet resident needs.
- Adaptation of wearable tech must fit the culture and needs. Wireless technology doesn't work in all areas, and some residents will not wear something on their body.
- Motion sensor assistive technology can be very effective in notifying senior living communities of resident activity or lack thereof within their apartments, indicating that a fall has taken place. However, there must be a willingness on the part of the resident to have behavior monitored.
- Less intrusive systems involve bed and chair alarms that notify caregivers when a resident at risk of falling is moving about.
- Less high-tech remedies such as floor lighting to show the way to the bathroom, or lights that go on automatically when a room is entered, are also very effective.
- One limitation to technology is cost. Medicare reimbursement is not consistent for these tools and therefore the cost frequently must be passed on to the resident and or family.

Prevention

Prevention is the key to reducing falls. Residents should have a fall assessment completed, followed by a care plan tailored to their individual needs. Prevention includes:

- Fall assessments that can identify residents at risk of falling, including an assessment of balance and strength.
- Screening for osteoporosis and low vitamin D and C.



- Development of an intervention care plan that is revisited every six months.
- Engaging Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy before a fall occurs.
- Exercises such as yoga and Tai Chi to help with balance and strengthen muscles.
- Proper use of assistive devices such as walkers and canes.
- Encouraging use of assistive devices to help with ambulation.
- Removal of rugs and slippery surfaces, and the addition of handrails and grab bars to help prevent falls.

Unfortunately, Medicare does not cover periodic screenings for balance issues or pay for physical and occupational therapy for falls prevention.

Polypharmacy

Some medications have side effects that impair mobility. It is important to know what the side effects of all medications are to determine if they should still be prescribed and if so, what action can be taken to minimize the fall risk. Some suggestions include:

- Having a pharmacist periodically review resident medications for side effects and interactions.
- Coordinating oversight among health care professionals and communicating with the primary care physician, ancillary service providers, and assisted living nurse.
- Careful and regular medication reviews are advised to reduce the effect of polypharmacy on falls.
- Conducting more research on how all medications affect frail seniors. New sedatives, sleep aids, or antipsychotics can be prescribed at too high of a dose for geriatrics. It is also important to know how these medications will impact someone with cognitive impairment.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important topic. We look forward to continuing the discussion on fall prevention for seniors.