

Partnership Jumpstarts

Matter of Balance Program in South Carolina

Issue:

Many seniors experience fear of falling and restrict their activities. Falls are the leading cause of injury-related visits to the emergency departments in the United States and the primary cause of unintentional deaths in people over 65.

In South Carolina, the number one cause of non-fatal injuries for people ages 65 and older is falls. In 2005, more than 24,000 S.C. adults 65 and older sustained injuries caused by falls, and 161 people died as a result of fall-related injuries. There were 19,600 emergency department visits and 6,200 hospitalizations. Charges for acute care due to falls totaled more than \$423 million for all ages, and 58 percent of this cost was for people 65 years and older.

Intervention:

The Lt. Governor's Office on Aging and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control's (DHEC) Division of Injury and Violence Prevention (DIVP) and Healthy Aging Program partnered to address these alarming statistics and fear of falling among the older population. The \$5,000 investment from the DIVP's Public Health Injury Surveillance Prevention Program Grant funded the training materials for Matter of Balance (MOB) classes. The MOB sessions focus on controlling falls and fear of falling, setting realistic goals for increasing activity, changing the environment to reduce fall risk factors, and promoting exercise to increase strength and balance. Lay coaches lead the eight-week program, held in six counties in diverse settings such as senior centers, community centers, churches, and senior housing.

As part of the intervention, MOB coaches:

- Disseminated data and information on falls among the older population;
- Provided instruction on exercises to improve balance and physical endurance and fall prevention;
- Presented new materials in their classes such as exercise DVD's and binders of printed materials.

Impact:

As a result of this program, the DIVP and Healthy Aging Program partnership developed a statewide strategic plan to prevent falls among older adults. The plan will be used as a roadmap for future interventions and partnerships. In addition after completing MOB, participants demonstrated significant improvements in their level of falls management, falls control, level of exercise and social limitations with regard to concern about falling. From a survey initiated in Low Country Senior Center Program in Charleston, S.C., here's what a few had to say:

- "The Matter of Balance class helped me increase my activity level through improved confidence," said one female in the 75-79 age group. "I also added more nightlights in my home"
- "The Matter of Balance class helped me realize how much better I feel when I exercise consistently," said a female in the 80-85 age group. "I now attend the Center's fitness room more regularly."
- "I accept help when it is offered and refrain from climbing ladders when I am home alone." said a male in the 80-85 age group. "I exercise more often to improve my balance and mobility. I am very active around the house and want to keep it that way."

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