

15th June 2016

Dear General Practitioner,

How do General Practitioners address falls prevention in their everyday practice with older people?

You have received this letter and enclosed survey as your practice is listed on the Health and Social Care Information Centre website. We are writing to ask if you would give support to our survey. This is a national survey of GPs in England on their practice in relation to falls prevention for older people within primary care.

Why we want to survey GPs

Due to their frequent contact with older patients, GPs are crucial for effective identification of falls risk, management of falls prevention, and referrals to community health services. Currently, little is known regarding current practice regarding falls prevention and it is unclear whether general practitioners in the UK screen their older patients for falls, discuss falls prevention or refer older patients for falls assessments and interventions.

Background of the wider project

Previous research carried out at the University of Sydney, Australia investigated GPs identifying older people at risk of falls, their provision of access to falls prevention services, and considered referral pathways that work effectively (Kielich et al 2016). The Department of Clinical Sciences within the College of Health and Life Sciences at Brunel University London, saw value in repeating this research in the UK. This study has received funding from the UK OT Research Foundation (UKOTRF) of the College of Occupational Therapists. Research ethics approval has been obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Clinical Sciences at Brunel University London. The survey does not require additional NHS approval as this is defined as a service evaluation.

Why falls prevention is an important topic for general practice

Falls and falls-related injury rates increase with age and are becoming a more frequent cause of loss of health as well as reduced confidence and independence in older people (NICE 2015). The population of the UK is ageing, and it is estimated that 30-50% of older people living in the community over the age of 65 will experience a fall every year and half of these will fall multiple times (NICE 2015). This means several thousand older people in the community will fall each year that would benefit from preventative falls assessment and interventions.

Surveying GPs as an initial step

GPs are crucial for effective identification of risk and management of falls prevention due to their frequent contact with many older people and their role as referral agents in community health services (Mackenzie et al, 2013). Little is known about their current practice regarding falls prevention with older people and it is unclear whether general practitioners in the UK are screening older adult patients for falls, discussing falls prevention, or referring older adult patients for falls assessments and interventions.

The aim of the research

We know that falls can be prevented. The most recent Cochrane systematic review of community-based fall interventions (Gillespie et al, 2012), systematic reviews and meta analyses all demonstrate continued support for balance and strength exercises, home safety interventions, and medication reviews as effective in preventing falls in community-residing older people (Pit et al, 2007; Sherrington et al, 2008; Clemson et al, 2008). However, there is currently no clear model for engaging GPs in falls prevention, leaving a huge gap of missed opportunity.

In order for community falls prevention knowledge translation to take place we need to understand the contextual factors affecting the health professionals involved (Damschroder et al, 2009). Very little research is available about what GPs do to address falls prevention in everyday practice with older people. The data from the study will provide information that may be useful in describing the current perceptions and practice of general practitioners in falls prevention, as well as future research needed.

Research methods

Consultation with GPs and older adults has informed the research process and content. Following advice of GP colleagues we have received support from your CCG to approach your practice and to survey GPs using the enclosed paper questionnaire. We also have an online version of the survey at: <https://brunel.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/falls-prevention>. We hope that providing two different methods to complete the survey will increase our response rate. We anticipate that the survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The closing date for both paper and online versions of the survey is 26th July 2016. We have included a franked addressed envelope for the return of the paper survey to us. This is an anonymous survey.

Prize draw & survey completion letter

As a thank you, we will have a draw to give away 20 prizes of £50 Amazon vouchers to survey participants. Details on how to enter the draw are included in the paper and online versions of the surveys. Additionally, an online printable Survey Completion Letter is available to GPs who complete the survey for CPD purposes. Access to this letter is available to both those who do and do not enter the prize draw.

We do hope you feel able to assist with this survey.

Please contact Dr Anne McIntyre at Anne.McIntyre@brunel.ac.uk or Michele Harvey at 1101426@my.brunel.ac.uk if you would like more information.

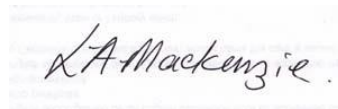
The study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Clinical and Life Sciences, Brunel University London. In case of query or complaint, please contact the Chair of the Committee, Christina.victor@brunel.ac.uk

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact The Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on +61 2 8627 8176 (Telephone); +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile) or ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).

Yours faithfully,



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Brunel University London



A/Prof Lynette Mackenzie
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University of Sydney

References

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