

Facilitating Effective Communication Between First Responders and Older Adults During Fall Incidents

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Introduction

- **Falls** are a major public health issue for older adults
- **First responders** (FR) often assist OA fallers (Pressman, Piertryzyk, & Schneider, 2011)
- **Occupational therapists** can help FR's work more effectively with OA's during fall incidents, and also help prevent future falls

Literature Review

Falls in Older Adults

- 1:3 individuals 65 or older falls each year in USA (CDC, 2013)
- OA's prone to falls due to age-related physical changes and disease processes (Rubenstein, 2006)

Communication Needs of Older Adults

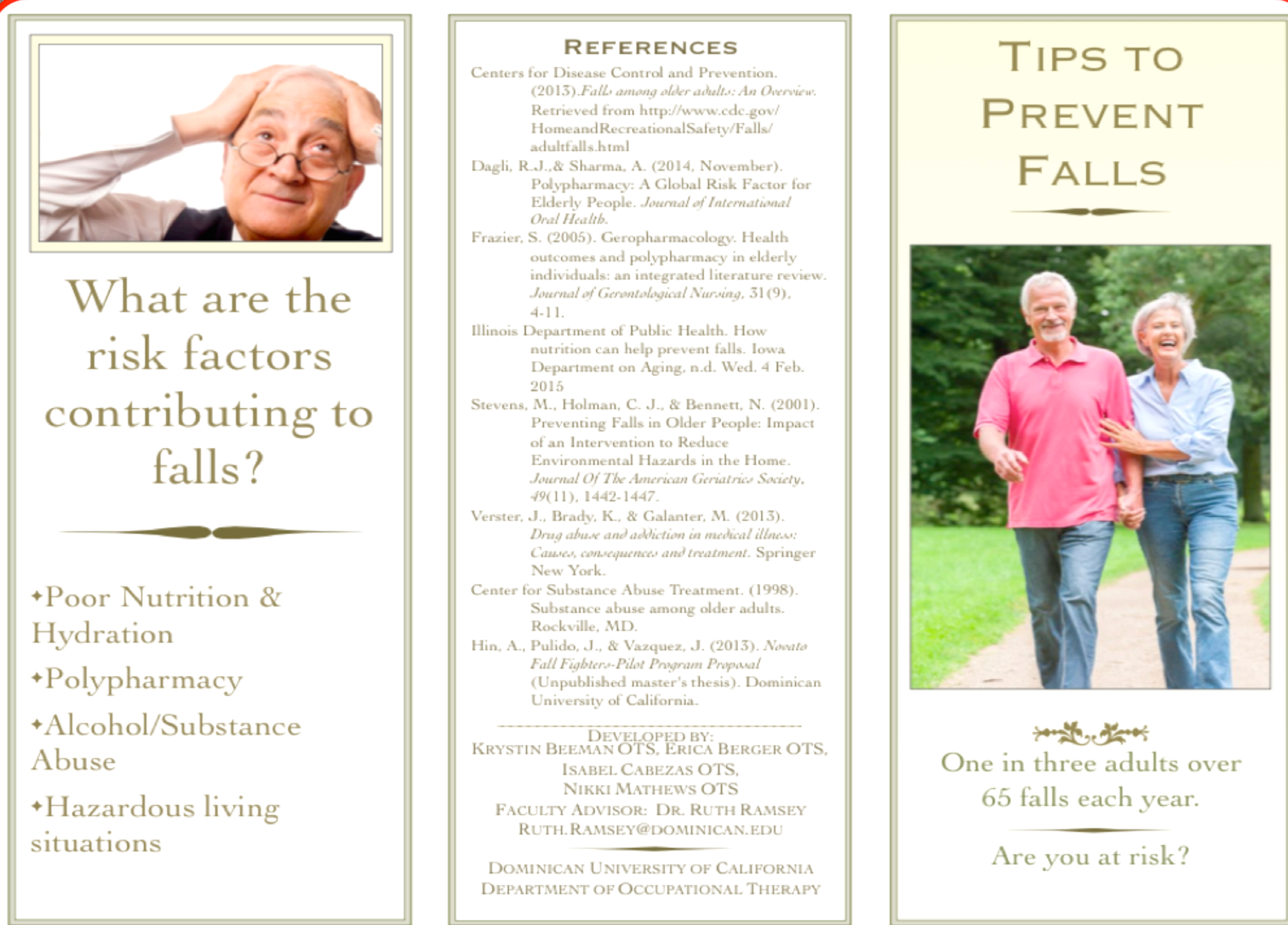
- OA's often have decreased abilities to communicate effectively due to decline in physical health and cognitive function, including memory (Baylor et al., 2010)
- FR's must be able to effectively communicate to assess and administer proper care to OA's, especially during a fall incident (Elmqvist, Fridlund & Ekeberg, 2008)

First Responders & Older Adults

- FR receive 17.4 million calls per year for OA's (Jacobson et al., 2012)
- 1:12 calls are OA's who have fallen (Rattue, 2012)

First Responders & Occupational Therapists

- OT's provide assessment, training, and support to help prevent falls in OA's (AOTA, 2013)
- OT's can establish and implement community-based fall prevention programs for clients at risk of falling or who have already fallen



Project Purpose

- Educate FR's re: needs of OA's during fall incidents
- Improve communication skills of FR's with OA's
- Improve quality of interactions, between FR's and OA's
- Provide FR's with referral sources for OA fallers and their families

Project Implementation

Format

- Educational presentations to Novato Fire Department (NFD)
- 2 hours each, presented to all shifts at NFD (6X)

Methods

- Lecture, PowerPoint, series of "drills" or role play, discussion

Topics

- Role of OT in fall prevention, statistics re: OA's & challenges of aging, information about fall-risk factors, communication deficits of OA's, especially those with Alzheimer's & dementia, hearing loss, polypharmacy, nutrition, effective communication strategies
- Brochure with additional resources for FP

Evaluation & Recommendations

- 95% of participants satisfied with presentation
- Humor helped build rapport with FR's
- Recommend giving presentations to other fire districts
- Give presentations in classroom settings to ↑ participant engagement

Collaboration between FR's and OT's can improve communication during fall incidents, help decrease falls in OA's, and establish new roles for OT in community health and fall prevention.

References

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