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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, Pietrzyk, & Schneider, 2011)
- Occupational therapists can help FR's work more effectively with OAs 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)
- OAs prone to falls due to age-related physical changes and disease processes (Rubenstein, 2006)

Communication Needs of Older Adults
- OAs 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 OAs, especially during a fall incident (Elmqvist, Fridlund & Ekeberg, 2008)

First Responders & Older Adults
- FR receive 17.4 million calls per year for OAs (Jacobson et al., 2012)
- 1:12 calls are OAs who have fallen (Rattue, 2012)

First Responders & Occupational Therapists
- OT's provide assessment, training, and support to help prevent falls in OAs (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 OAs during fall incidents
- Improve communication skills of FR's with OAs
- Improve quality of interactions, between FR's and OAs
- Provide FR's with referral sources for OA fallers and their families

Project Implementation

Format
- Educational presentations to Novato Fire Department (NFD)

Methods
- Lecture, PowerPoint, series of “drills” or role play, discussion

Topics
- Role of OT in fall prevention, statistics re: OAs & challenges of aging, information about fall-risk factors, communication deficits of OAs, especially those with Alzheimer’s & dementia, hearing loss, polypharmacy, nutrition, effective communication strategies

Evaluation & Recommendations

- 95% of participants satisfied with presentation
- Humor helped build rapport with FR's
- Recommend giving presentations to other fire districts

References