

Therapy reduces severity of falls: Study

Abigail Ng

Physical therapy may not significantly reduce the number of falls for the elderly, but it helps in dampening the severity of falls, according to a new study.

The study also found that physical therapy has a limited impact if the patient has two or more chronic ailments.

Researchers from Duke-NUS Medical School teamed up with Singapore General Hospital, Changi General Hospital (CGH) and the Agency for Integrated Care to study the effects of tailored physical therapy on fall prevention for the elderly.

The Steps to Avoid Falls in Elderly (Safe) study recruited 354 patients above the age of 65 who sought medical attention for falls at emergency departments.

Half of them were randomly picked to undergo intensive tailored therapy, with costs waived and transport provided.

The other half were prescribed treatment that included standard physiotherapy. However, no one in this control group actually attended the physiotherapy sessions.

Patients in both groups – each comprising 177 people – were tracked for nine months after their visit to the emergency department.

During this period, the number of people who suffered falls in ei-



ther group was not significantly different, said researchers.

However, fewer seniors who underwent therapy had serious falls – 25 out of 54 in this group (46.3 per cent) were injured, compared with 40 out of 67 seniors in the control group (59.7 per cent). Falls were considered “injurious” if medical attention was required or daily activities were restricted for two days.

Retired teacher Juriah Komzari,

69, received intensive therapy after a fall three years ago and said the exercises helped her to be more confident on public transport. Madam Juriah has not fallen since.

The study also found that those with multiple existing illnesses, such as cancer or cardiac failure, did not benefit as much from therapy.

CGH senior consultant and director of community geriatrics Christopher Lien said such diseases affect

blood pressure, judgment and stamina, which can lead to falls. Side effects of medication can also increase the risk of falling, he said.

Professor David Matchar, lead author of the study, said the team hopes to better understand why seniors who are more frail are not benefiting as much. “It may be due to overprotectiveness of caregivers.”

abigailng@sph.com.sg

St Andrew's Senior Care deputy director Mina Lee with retiree Juriah Komzari, who had a fall three years ago. Madam Juriah says therapy exercises have helped her to be more confident on public transport and she has not fallen since.
ST PHOTO:
LIM YAOHUI