

PERSPECTIVES

Guest commentary: We can and must reduce injuries from falls among our seniors

By Doug Hartman, Co-Chairman Step Smart Collier

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How often have you heard of an older relative or neighbor falling, being injured then taken to the hospital and never coming home again?

They are either transferred from the hospital to a managed care facility — or, worse — pass away. It has affected most of us one way or another.

Did you know that falls are the leading cause of injury and death for seniors? One in three seniors fall each year and 20 percent of them are hospitalized.

Eleven percent never return home while 50 percent of those hospitalized pass away within one year. The average death rate of seniors who have fallen in Collier County is 55 percent higher than the average for the state of Florida. Entering our senior years should not be the equivalent of entering a combat zone!

Falling down is not an inevitable part of aging. Our health care and EMS professionals tell us there are steps — Smart Steps — that

can be taken to reduce the number of serious falls among seniors.

It is this finding that caused a coalition of interested civic leaders, nonprofits and health professionals to come together to generate a major public information program called "Step Smart Collier."

Step Smart Collier's mission is to educate the public on the smart steps that can be taken to get this problem under control.

Most of the "steps" involve common sense actions, such as safety-proofing our homes by installing slip-resistant tape under loose rugs, placing "grab rails" in bathrooms and stairways and installing night lights in stairs and hallways among others.

Other steps involve engaging in exercise routines intended to maintain core strength and agility, which can reduce the damage when one does fall.

One surprising fact is the number of falls occurring in public parking lots where seniors get out of a car and trip over the curb bumpers placed at the end of each parking space. The curbs make for a well-organized and neat parking lot but at what price? Isn't there a better way? As our population ages, we must engineer a safer environment for them.

We are all aware of the problem we have with some seniors failing to take medicine either on schedule or in the right quantity. When this is combined with the risks created by combining drugs from different doctors with those purchased over the counter, plus vitamin supplements, we have potential medication interactions that create an unnecessary cause for many of the falls being treated by our EMS teams.

Step Smart Collier is hosting a series of safety fairs in public

facilities throughout the county.

The presentations will bring together the companies, hospital staff, hardware retailers and professional advisers to conduct free safety briefings and lectures on the steps that have proven successful in reducing the fall rate by as much as 40 percent in other counties.

Included will be free audits by a pharmacist of drug lists used by seniors and computerized "balance tests," with a printout that can be shared with doctors and exercise advisers.

Step Smart Collier will also distribute safety audit check sheets for all citizens to take home to conduct their own safety audit. Similar literature will be distributed throughout our schools and churches in an effort to reach all our seniors and their caregivers.

The first Step Smart Collier safety fair will be held at the Collier County South Regional Library on Lely Cultural Parkway on Thursday, June 16. The lecture is scheduled from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. while the booths and displays will be open from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Additional fairs will follow this fall at other regional libraries, churches, adult care centers and meeting halls.

Speakers are available to address local groups ranging in size from 20 to 300. Please contact Doug Hartman at 239-331-8662 if you would like to schedule a presentation and exhibits for your group on this subject.

Find this article at:

<http://www.naplesnews.com/opinion/perspectives/guest-commentary-we-can-and-must-reduce-injuries-from-falls-among-our-seniors-34b2ea2f-46a0-4cce-e05-382372981.html>

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