Preventing falls in people with dementia: What can we do together?

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What I want to share with you today

• My perspective on fall prevention for people living with memory loss

• What I learned from existing scientific studies

• What care partners of people living with memory loss shared with me
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What is fall

- Fall: an unexpected event in which the participants come to rest on the ground, floor, or lower level (Lamb et al., 2005)
Why fall prevention for people with memory loss

• Higher risk of falling than age-matched peers (Allan et al., 2009)

• Negative impact on people with memory loss (Shaw, 2002)

• Negative impact on care partners (Leggett et al., 2018)

• Importance of avoid hospitalization during COVID-19
Why fall prevention for people with memory loss

• This is our strength - There are things we can do, and we have done!

• Other benefits – health and well-being for both people with memory loss and their loved ones (Zhou et al., 2020)

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Challenge 1: Limited evidence-based programs for older adults with memory loss

**Exercise**

- Toulotte, 2003;
- Pitkälä et al., 2013

**Nightlight path and fall alert**

- Tchalla et al., 2013
Challenge 2: SO MANY risk factors of falling

Fall risk factors shared between older adults with and without dementia:
- Age & age-related changes
- Normal aging sensory impairments
- Chronic illnesses and frailty
- Unsupportive footwear
- Behaviors, such alcohol consumption
- History of falls
- Fear of falling

Fall risk factors more pronounced in persons with dementia:
- Gait and balance impairments
- Autonomic dysfunction/orthostasis
- Visuospatial deficits
- CNS-active medications
- Home and environmental safety
- Improper assistive device use
- Functional deficits
- Diabetes and Depression
- Female sex

Fall risk factors unique in persons with dementia:
- Type of dementia
- Neuropsychiatric symptoms of dementia
- Sedentary behavior
- Unmet needs
- Caregiver burden

Casey, Caulley, Phelan, 2020
Challenge 3: It can be a difficult conversation

- People don’t want to admit themselves experiencing fall risk
- People don’t want to admit their loved ones experiencing fall risk
- Fall risk means a lot of life changes might happen
- Stigma of having fall, being old, and vulnerable
What care partners shared with me

How to start the conversation about falls

What we could do together to prevent the falls
How to start the conversation about falls

• Observing

• Co-learning

• Listening to the voice of people living with memory loss
What we could do together to prevent the falls

- Mobility assistance
- Medical management
- Health promotion
- Environment modification
- Caring for care partners
- Help-seeking
Mobility assistance

• “Hold his hand”, “let her lean on me”
• Walking aids
  • How to deal with the stigma?
  • Negotiate with primary care providers

• What if people with memory loss don’t like it?
  • They have their own way
  • They accept different people’s help
  • They prefer different type of help (e.g., reminder)
Medical management

• Other health conditions related to falls (i.e. dehydration, infections, pains)

• Medications

• You can initiate this conversation with the primary care providers if you think it might be relevant to you
• **Exercise**
  - Engage other family members and friends
  - Use activities in everyday life (in the community)
  - Exercises that all can enjoy (Yoga, Tai Chi)
  - Check your health plan

• **Nutrition**
  - Develop healthy diet routine early on
  - Reminder
  - Reduce care partners’ care burden

• **Mental health**
  - “Make them happy"
Environmental modification

- Start with small-scale changes
- Plan with other family members

- Assistive technology
  - GPS
  - Fall alert
  - Discussion: are you comfortable with these technologies?
Caring for care partners

• Self-care

• Social connections
Help-seeking

- Seek help from other families and friends
- Direct care workers
- Respite care
- Support groups
- Receiving training
The impact of these efforts requires further examination.

- Mobility assistance
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A lot of things that the society need to do

• Dementia-capable medical care system
• Dementia-capable health promotion policy and services
• Workplace policy to support caregiving
• Housing
• Support for using technology
• Care network support services
• Alternative care options
• Destigmatize fall, aging, and dementia
• Falls prevention conversation guide for caregivers: https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FallsPrevention_FINAL.pdf

• Falls Risk and Alzheimer Disease: A Patient Guide: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apmr.2020.01.005
Questions

• How do you think we can make the “fall conversation” easier?

• What strategies you have tried at home and you find it helpful?

• Any questions/suggestions for me?
References (I)

References (II)


• Casey, C. M., Caulley, J., & Phelan, E. A. (2020). The Intersection of Falls and Dementia in Primary Care: Evaluation and Management Considerations. *Medical Clinics of North America.*