

**Press release – 30<sup>th</sup> October 2017**



## **Patient safety work to reduce falls at South Tyneside hospital set to be shared across the NHS**

A new initiative to help reduce in-patient falls at South Tyneside District Hospital is set to be replicated by other NHS organisations across the country thanks to the hard work and enthusiasm of staff in South Tyneside to improve patient safety.

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust was one of only 19 Trusts in England selected to take part in NHS Improvement's Falls Collaborative, with a view to reducing the rate of in-patient falls and sharing examples of best practice and innovation which could be replicated across the NHS.

Staff in South Tyneside developed the 'falls risk assessment and individualised care plan' which was introduced across the Trust this summer and means all patients aged 65 and over who are admitted to South Tyneside District Hospital are now assessed within 48 hours of admission for their risk of falling.

The pioneering work has now been voted as the best idea for other Trusts to follow, with fellow participants in the Falls Collaborative planning to adopt the model.

The Trust's falls lead, Consultant Geriatrician Dr Suba Thirugnanasothy, said: "At the final Falls Collaborative event, every participating Trust was able to showcase their work over the last year. We were delighted when our new falls risk assessment and care plan was voted as the best idea that other Trusts wanted to adopt. There was a lot of interest in it and recognition of how, at South Tyneside, we are looking at falls prevention from a truly multi-disciplinary point of view."

Melanie Johnson, Executive Director of Nursing and Patient Experience at the Trust, said: "This is excellent news and well deserved recognition. I would like to say thank you to everyone involved - doctors, nurses, falls specialists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, continence and delirium experts, pharmacy staff and the Falls Collaborative project team - for all their hard work, dedication and enthusiasm to improve patient safety. The success we have had so far in reducing in-patient falls resulting in harm is extremely encouraging and we are committed to improving even further."

Alison Smith, Senior Clinical Lead for NHS Improvement in Cumbria and the North East, and regional lead for the Falls Collaborative, said: "It's a testament to the energy, enthusiasm and commitment shown by the team at South Tyneside that their work was chosen as the project organisations most wanted to implement themselves. Their efforts are already bearing fruit locally and patients across the whole NHS will benefit from the powerful work of the team in South Tyneside being replicated in other organisations."

South Tyneside Hospital saw a dramatic 53% reduction in the number of falls leading to patient harm in the first six months of this year compared to the same period last year. Before being given the opportunity to join the collaborative, the Trust had already identified falls as a top priority and quality improvement work had begun. This included increased training for medical and nursing staff, renewed emphasis on medical staff reviewing medications known to increase the risk of falling in older adults, and the appointment of a falls specialist nurse. Link nurses for falls have also

been identified on every ward. The falls specialist nurse meets with them and gives monthly updates to the Trust's falls operational group, which ensures that improvements and learning are shared throughout the organisation. In addition, new starters in the Trust at all levels receive some falls training as part of the staff induction programme.

The risk assessment covers delirium, continence, mobility, vision, lying and standing blood pressure checks and medication.

Dr Thirugnanasothy said: "Tackling the problem of in-patient falls in hospital is very challenging and, whilst there are no single or easily defined actions which when done on their own are shown to reduce falls, research has shown that multiple interventions from a multi-disciplinary team, tailored to the individual patient, can reduce falls by 20%–30%. These interventions are particularly important for patients with dementia or delirium, who are at high risk of falling in hospital. Our aim is to ensure that all in-patients aged 65 and over are appropriately assessed for their risks of falling and that a care plan is produced which is tailored to their individual needs."

Falls in hospital are the most commonly reported patient safety incident in the NHS and some result in serious injuries, such as hip fracture and head injuries which can have serious consequences. Minor injuries from a fall can affect a patient's physical function, resulting in reduced mobility and undermining their confidence and independence.

All falls, even those that do not result in injury, cause significant distress and anxiety for the patient and their family. Falls are also costly to the NHS as they increase length of hospital stay and can be associated with additional care costs on discharge.

**ENDS**

*Photo caption: South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's falls lead Dr Suba Thirugnanasothy, left, and falls specialist nurse Catherine Peel, centre, receiving the Certificate of Achievement from the Falls Collaborative for the idea most want to adopt from Zoe Packman, Head of Professional Development at NHS Improvement*

#### **Notes to editors**

- NHS Improvement estimate that the total cost to the NHS of reported in-patient falls for 2015/16 was £630 million
- In 2015/16 more than 250,000 falls were reported across acute, mental health and community hospital settings
- Older patients are both more likely to fall and more likely to suffer harm. 77% of all reported in-patient falls happen to patients over the age of 65

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