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Effects of Alarms in Fall Prevention in Older Adults

Hillary Newlin and Erika Samuelsen



What We Learned

As part of our research course, we discussed the importance of nurses in research and their role in evidenced based practice. We conducted a literature review, by obtaining four sources from nursing journals, in order to understand the current research being done on alarm use in older adults. This allowed us to gain a better understanding of how to read research and apply it to practice.

Background

Falls are the number one cause of nonfatal injuries in older adults and because of this there had been controversy on the best way to prevent falls in this population. The use of alarms as a way to prevent falls has been used in long term care facilities since 1987, but facilities are trying to move away from their use to make the facility seem more like the residents' home.

Purpose & Aims

- Determine whether or not personal alarms are a useful tool in aiding in the prevention of falls or if they have an adverse effect and lead to an increase in falls
- To understand the process of completing a literature review

Sample

- Four research articles published between 2009-2015
- 3 quantitative research articles & 1 meta-analysis
- All studies were completed in long term care facilities

Methods

A literature review of four articles was done. The articles were obtained from CINAHL using the search terms fall risk, alarm use, and falls. The parameters for the search were any articles that were published from 2009-2015, within nursing journals or with nurses as authors.

Results

- Two of the four studies concluded that the removal of alarms decreased the risk of falls because interventions were put in place to address the underlying issues. Another study concluded that the use of alarms helped to prevent falls when individualized. The fourth study analyzed was a meta-analysis which determined through laboratory experiments and real life field tests, that alarm use helped to decrease fall risk.



Discussion

- Alarms can be removed if underlying cause of falls was determined
- Use of more than one alarm type increased effectiveness when personalized to the resident
- More than one intervention is the best management for fall risk
- Noise produced by alarms takes away from home-like environment, increases agitation to residents, and desensitizes staff

Next Steps

- Analyze the use of alarms in different populations
- Analyze qualitative research to gain an understanding of staff and resident feelings in regards to alarm use
- Gather and analyze more research studies

Limitations

- Only four research articles were analyzed
- All studies were conducted in long term care facilities
- All studies were quantitative

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