Every year, 22,500 falls are reported throughout the Winnipeg Health Region in hospitals, personal care homes, and in the community. With a growing population of elderly patients, St-Boniface Hospital has been creating awareness and initiating strategies to reduce the risk of falls and injuries.

Lynda Mandzuk, Clinical Nurse Specialist, Rehabilitation Geriatrics Program, says falls are a big concern for health professionals. Falls with injury can impact a person’s independence and quality of life and add days to a patient’s hospital stay.

“As health professionals, we work to help keep patients safe,” says Mandzuk. “Although all patients are at risk of falling, we are focused on elderly patients who are at greater risk due to age, balance or mobility issues, impaired vision, cognitive impairment, side effects from medications, or due to their medical conditions.”

In the last year, several units within the Geriatrics, Family Medicine, and Internal Medicine Programs began trialing initiatives to reduce the risk of falls and injuries for all patients. The first involves assessing the patient’s fall risk, health issues, current mobility, and medications, within one hour of their arrival on a unit. A care team including nursing, pharmacy, physiotherapy, and occupational therapy, assesses the patient’s fall risk and develops a personalized fall prevention care plan. The plan is shared with the entire care team, including the patient and their family.

“Patients and families are invited to participate in the development of the fall prevention care plan,” says Mandzuk. “When they understand the risks, they may be more likely to call for help and continue some of the strategies when they return home.”

Other strategies include placing equipment on one side of the hallway to reduce clutter, removing tripping hazards from patient rooms such as unnecessary equipment, ensuring patients have non-slip footwear and walking aids, and reminding patients to call for help if needed.

**Defining a fall**

A fall occurs when a patient unintentionally comes to rest on the ground, floor, or another lower level, with or without injury.

Despite best efforts, patients still fall. When patients fall, they are immediately assessed for injuries, the team reviews what occurred and why, and the fall prevention care plan is revised.

“We try to determine why the patient fell to address the root cause and prevent future falls,” says Mandzuk. “If someone has fallen once, they are at higher risk of falling again.”

As a result of these initiatives, all three units have seen a decrease in falls with injuries. The successful fall prevention initiatives will be shared with other areas of the Hospital in early 2016.

*Source: Winnipeg Regional Health Authority*