Fall prevention in nursing homes: Comparison of local and international guidelines and policies

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Background

Falls are prevalent in nursing home settings. Frequent falls and the resulting injuries increase the costs for nursing homes. We reviewed fall prevention guidelines and policies for nursing homes in the USA, Canada, the UK, and Australia, and compared with those in Hong Kong to identify areas for improvement.

Methods

PubMed, JSTOR, and Google Scholar were searched for interventional studies on fall prevention published between 2006 and 2015, using the following keywords: 'fall', 'nursing home', 'prevention'; 'program' or 'polic*'; and 'North America' or 'United States' or 'Canad*' or 'Australia' or 'Brit*' or 'Hong Kong'. Using the same set of keywords, a Google search was conducted to identify relevant government policies on governmental websites.

Results

Table 1. Reviewed documents by type and country

	HK	USA	Canada	UK	Australia	Other
# Studies	5	10	6	3	4	5
# Policies	2	2	1	2	2	0

HK- ***"Code of Practice for Private Hospitals, Nursing Homes, and Maternity Homes"***

Table 2. Intervention and policy areas identified

Intervention areas	*Policy areas*
Exercise	Fall prevention program
Reducing immobility	Facilities
Promoting ambulation	Physical and mental assessments
Level of care	Post-fall assessments
Multifactorial programs - Education - Hazard assessment - Medication review	Drug management
	Accident management
	Nursing and medical care
	Therapy
	Restorative care

Table 3. Policy areas covered by different countries

	Comprehensiveness of policy areas by country				
	HK	USA	Canada	UK	Australia
Fall prevention program	N/A	N/A	***	**	N/A
Facilities	*	***	**	***	**
Physical and mental assessments	*	***	**	***	**
Post-fall assessments	N/A	*	**	***	N/A
Drug management	*	***	***	*	*
Accident management/ prevention	***	**	**	**	**
Nursing and medical care	*	***	*	**	**
Therapy	*	**	*	**	***
Restorative care	*	**	**	***	***

Hong Kong has no policy exclusive to nursing homes for the elderly.

Implications for practice

Majority of the studies that saw significant impact in decreasing fall rate and risk involved increasing movement in the resident's daily life under supervision, be it specific exercise routines, such as Tai Chi, or encouraging daily routine activities, such as light household chores.

Future direction for policy

1) Regional policies on nursing homes must specify requirements for adequate space in nursing homes for the elderly, as this contributes to a decline in quality of care and an increase in fall risk.
2) Policies on encouraging restorative care may prevent decline in ADLs, ambulation, and cognitive levels of nursing home residents.
3) Institution-specific policies overseeing the frequency and quality of environment hazard assessments, resident health assessments, re-educating staff in fall prevention may alleviate the risk/ prevalence of falls.

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