

Danbury Hospital Patient Education Sheet

Falls Education Sheet for Oncology Patient & Family**Fall prevention facts for the oncology patient**

There are several factors that put oncology patients at a higher risk for falls. Fall prevention education is important to lessen this risk.

Cancer and cancer treatments often cause loss of strength. When hospitalized, bed rest and decreased activity also place you at risk for losing muscle strength. Additionally, changes in medications may affect the way you feel. Common medications used for oncology patients include:

- Pain medications
- Stool softeners
- Anti-anxiety pills
- Stomach medications
- Chemotherapy
- Steroids
- Sleep aids
- Water pills

Pain medications and other medications that act on the nervous system can affect coordination, balance, blood pressure, and sensation. They may cause feelings of faintness or may make you more drowsy, forgetful or confused. It is important to know the side effects of your medications so that you can tell your physician and nurse how the medications affect the way you feel.

What might I experience as a result of cancer treatments?

Cancer treatments may have certain side effects that can place oncology patients at risk to fall. These effects include:

- **Peripheral neuropathy**—a decrease in sensation and a feeling of tingling in the fingers and toes. Some chemotherapy agents like the “platins” and “taxanes” can cause peripheral neuropathy.

- **Postural hypotension**—a drop in blood pressure when a person moves from a sitting or lying position to a standing position.

Please be sure to move slowly and at a steady pace. If you feel dizzy or light headed, stay seated or lie back down in bed and use the call bell to alert the nursing staff.

- **Anemia**—low blood cell counts make you feel more tired. Your ability to perform regular physical activities may become more difficult.
- **Electrolyte imbalances** (such as potassium, sodium, magnesium, calcium) are also common in cancer patients and can cause weakening of the heart muscles and nervous system, as well as changes in mental status.
- **Changes in nervous system and thought processes**—this can change the body’s ability to coordinate movement and can cause unsteadiness. Changes in walking patterns can occur without you even realizing it.
- **Delirium**—this is common with cancer patients undergoing cancer treatments. Delirium happens quickly and can cause a feeling of being in a dream-like state. This is a temporary condition that changes your ability to remain fully alert, concentrate, remember instructions and judge what is safe to do and not to do.

What will the staff at Danbury Hospital do and what can I do as the patient to help prevent falls?

Here at Danbury Hospital we are committed to keeping our patients safe. There are fall reduction measures used at

Danbury Hospital that can help to reduce the risk of fall or injury:

1. Hourly Rounding:

The nursing staff will make hourly rounds on all patients. The purpose of these rounds is to discuss your comfort and to provide you with assistance with whatever you need, such as pain medication, toileting or something to drink.

2. Use of Nurse Call Bell:

The nursing staff will teach you how to use the nurse call bell and the staff will make sure that it is in your reach to use. It is important to press the call bell and ask for help before getting out of bed by yourself. This will help to prevent falls.

3. Bed Alarms

Staff may use a bed and/ or chair alarm (which produces a distinct sound that notifies staff that you need assistance). Alarms may be used temporarily or during your entire stay in order to assist you with activities and to keep you safe.

4. Physical Therapy

A physical therapist (PT) may be consulted if you are experiencing changes in your ability to walk. The PT can help you to learn and do helpful exercises, and provide you with walking and balance training.

5. Walking aids

The PT may want to introduce a walking device to help you if your ability to walk worsens and to maintain balance. Please, let your care team know about assistive devices used at home.

Wear comfortable shoes during the day. Ask your family to bring in sneakers so it will be easier to walk.

6. Screening for falls

The nursing staff will screen your fall risk level, assess your blood pressure and gait each day, and ask you questions regarding changes in your physical and mental status such as increased weakness or delirium. Please inform staff of any changes in the way you feel or think, such as just feeling a little “off” for you.

Let your nurse know if you have fallen recently at home, in the community or in your previous hospitalization.

7. Safety and Care Discussions

If you have any safety concerns regarding your care, talk with your physician and nurse about these so that they may help you with solutions that make sense and keep you safer. Please, do not be afraid to ask questions. Questions make good discussions.

- Most falls happen without any warning. Let your nurse know if you feel more tired than usual by an activity or from a walk.
- The staff will often instruct you not to get out of bed or chair without their assistance. At these times, please ring your nurse call bell when you need to get up and wait for them to help you.
- Remember, you are never a bother to staff. We want you to be safe and are concerned for your health and well-being.
- **If you are experiencing increased fatigue, weakness, any tingling in your fingers or toes, loss of sensation in your feet, unsteady gait, dizziness or memory lapses please let the staff know immediately and call for assistance.**

Sources:

Boyle,(2006) *Delirium in older adults with cancer: Implications for practice and research.* Oncology Nursing Forum;33 (1).

Ganz, et al. (2007). *Will my patient fall?* JAMA: 297 (1).

Swim Center for Cancer Care, Ascension Health. (2008). *Prevent Falls.*

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For more information, or to learn about the specialized services and programs available at Danbury Hospital, please visit www.DanburyHospital.org