Falls are the leading cause of injury-related deaths and the most common cause of hospital admissions for trauma in older Ohioans. Health care providers, like doctors, nurses, physical therapist, pharmacists, home health aides, senior center staff and others, are uniquely positioned to actively assess their patients' risk and teach them prevention strategies.

Older adults account for a disproportionate share of fall-related injuries. While Ohioans age 65 and older are 13.7 percent of our population, they account for more than 80 percent of fatal falls.

How Medical Professionals Can Prevent Falls

- Create a policy for falls prevention and ensure staff are aware of and understand it. View a sample policy.

- Post signs designating your office or facility as a "Fall-Free Zone." Encourage patients to ask for help and report slipping and tripping hazards to staff.

- Empower staff to offer assistance to patients who appear to be having trouble getting around. Identify patients who use a walker or other assistive device and plan time that is sufficient to provide the services they need.

- When the weather is snowy or icy, contact older patients who have appointments that day and offer to reschedule so that they don't feel obligated to go out in hazardous conditions.

- If someone falls in your office or facility, document the incident and examine the cause so that you can prevent future accidents.

- Call to check on any older patient who misses an appointment. Have alternate phone contacts for all older patients.

- Train staff to recognize patients who regularly wear safety alert devices or use walkers, canes or wheelchairs. Empower staff to start a conversation with these consumers if they see them not using their assistive devices.

- Be aware of extreme patient weight loss or gain. Improper nutrition may lead to muscle weakness and dizziness, which could result in a fall.

- Ensure that patients who wear glasses or hearing aides are wearing them and that they fit properly.

- If a patient has a history of falling, document his or her activities and look for patterns.

Four-step approach to help patients avoid falls

1. Be proactive. Ask all patients age 65 or older if they have fallen in the past year.

2. Identify and address fall risk factors:

   - Lower body weakness;

   - Gait and balance problems;

   - Psychoactive medications;

   - Postural dizziness;

   - Poor vision

   - Problems with feet or shoes; and

   - Home safety

3. Refer as needed to specialists or community programs.

4. Follow-up with patient within 30 days.

Adapted from "Preventing Falls in Older Patients: Provider Pocket Guide," published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

STEADI Toolkit

In clinical settings, an effective falls intervention involves assessing and addressing an individual's fall risk factors. The Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Older Adult Falls Prevention Coalition encourage all Ohio health care providers to adopt the STEADI (Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths & Injuries) toolkit.

STEADI is a suite of materials created for health care providers to help assess, treat and refer older patients based on their falls risk. STEADI can help you:

- Make fall prevention part of your practice;
- Get background information about falls;
- Read case studies featuring patients at risk of falling;
- Use validated tests to assess your patients' falls risk factors;
- Offer your patients a medical referral;
- Offer your patients encouragement, resources and referrals; and
- Earn reimbursements for fall screenings and fall prevention reimbursable services.

To request a free copy of the STEADI Toolkit, send your name, address, provider type and phone number to HealthyO@odh.ohio.gov.

For more tips and resources to prevent falls, visit:
www.steadyu.ohio.gov