Open visiting reduces the number of inpatient falls

Midlands trust says involvement of carers in support can make a significant contribution to falls prevention

By Alistair Kleebauer @alistairbauer

The introduction of open visiting has led to a drop in inpatient falls at a large NHS trust. There were 259 fewer falls recorded after open visiting was introduced in April last year at Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust, which runs Heartlands, Good Hope and Solihull Hospitals.

In the first quarter of 2014-15 there were 2,477 falls in the three hospitals, compared with 2,218 falls during the same period in 2015-16, shortly after open visiting began.

Heart of England believes that, while other falls prevention work is playing a part, the open visiting policy has made a significant contribution to the reduction.

Deputy chief nurse Julie Tunney said the policy allows carers and loved ones to be more involved in the care of older patients and those with dementia. Visitors can assist with care such as helping loved ones to eat and going to the bathroom.

She said: ‘Having this support on top of expert care from staff helps reduce the potential for falls in the acute setting, particularly for patients with dementia or delirium who can become easily confused.’

Ms Tunney added that open visiting allows families to stay with patients when doctors and nurses are busy on ward rounds.

University of Stirling dementia services development centre director June Andrews said that patients with dementia are more prone than others to falls in hospital.

‘I have said to people “don’t stand because you’ve had your hip replaced”, but they forget and fall over as a result,’ she said.

New experiences

‘Patients with dementia have difficulties adapting to new experiences, but people they know can help. A nurse can say “your dinner is here” and then leave. The other person can explain it at the right pace and with the right language.’

Other falls prevention work at Heart of England includes employing a falls specialist nurse to lead nurse experts, giving patients non-slip slippers and socks, and using low beds.

Ms Tunney said trusts considering an open visiting policy should:

■ Engage staff with the policy.
■ Pilot it in some areas of the trust.
■ Seek feedback before implementation.

Reinventing the wheel

Nurses at a Lincolnshire trust have improved the grading of patients’ pressure ulcers, thanks to a colleague’s innovative idea.

The pressure ulcer grading wheel features photographs of pressure ulcers and how their grades differ. The wheel was devised by Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust tissue viability nurse Judith Barnard.

In a test, nurses using the wheel graded 100% of pressure ulcers accurately, while nurses not using it graded 80% accurately.