

On-site Fall Prevention Education for FDWs

A Community Service Learning Project by 5 NUS undergrads:

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Singapore has one of the fastest ageing populations in the world. The proportion of elderly citizens – defined as residents aged 65 years and above – increased from 8.7% in 2008 to 13.7% in 2018 (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2019). This is set to increase to 25% in 2030, meaning 1 in 4 people will be 65 years old or older (National Population and Talent Division, 2016).

In response, the government has placed more emphasis and introduced multiple social support schemes such as the Pioneer Generation Package and MediShield Life, allocating more resources to cater to the changing needs of the ageing demographic.

Yet, as one ages, the incidence of disability increases, and their sphere of mobility decreases (Successful Ageing in Singapore: Urban interventions in a high-density city, 2017). It is especially crucial to maintain the mobility of seniors as those who lose independent mobility are less likely to remain in the community, have higher rates of disease, and have a poorer quality of life and greater likelihood of social isolation (Chumari, 2013). This is a direct challenge to managing and improving mobility - a key foundation in order for the population to age in place.

Considering the severity and prevalence of falls, it is crucial to ensure that there are measures in place to reduce the incidence of falls among the elderly. Current schemes are targeted at both the elderly, as well as their caregivers. Caregivers refer to “the person in charge of caring for the care recipient (this can include family members and foreign domestic workers (FDWs)”, who have taken on an instrumental role in fall-prevention. This is evidenced in a paper on the changing healthcare scene where “home carers are increasingly being recognized as essential partners in fall prevention and care delivery for older people” (Ang, O’Brien & Wilson, 2018, p.1). Notably, this definition of caregivers includes FDWs. In recent years, there has been a burgeoning demand by households in the hiring of FDWs to assist with eldercare (Yeoh & Huang, 2010). As a familialist society (Teo, 2015), this has shifted the responsibility of caring for the elderly that was previously assumed by family members (Teo, Chan, & Straughan, 2003) to FDWs. This reinforces the importance of the role of FDWs as caregivers, especially since they are hired to care for the elderly for most of the day. Aligning this to the concept of ageing-in-place, caregivers are crucial in ensuring that the elderly receive the support they need to maintain adequate levels of mobility and age gracefully in place.

There are opportunities for FDWs to undergo a training program which consists of a 2-day classroom training as well as a 3-hour home-based training course which has proved to be an effective preventive measure. Despite this, there has been a low uptake of these courses among maid employment agencies due to the financial costs (Mohandas, 2017).

Our service-learning project is aimed at developing interactive training to increase the Fall Prevention Awareness and Skills among FDWs who look after senior citizens. This is done through 15 min of experiential learning that involves card games and neighborhood walks. We hope to increase the knowledge and sensitivity of the FDWs to fall risks, translating into better care given to the elderly. Ultimately, we hope that our pilot can be extended by schools to improve existing service-learning projects to go beyond community service but community engagement.

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15 March 2019