

Abstract

Introduction: Falls in the elderly are a key issue in the Public Health due to its associated morbidity and mortality. One of the major consequences that can result from a fall are osteoporotic fractures, especially those that occur on the proximal femoral due to the frequent loss of autonomy and quality of life – and the costs that this entails - and high mortality rates. However, changing some behavioral and environmental risk factors can prevent the falls.

Objective: The aim of this thesis was to develop informative materials for a campaign for the falls prevention (FP) target for the elderly. The specific objectives are 1) to apply questionnaires to study the risk factors for falling, especially the existing knowledge about FP in the elderly community and 2) develop contents for the FP campaign, including flyers and posters to be distributed in the Family Health Units (FHU) in the Northern Region, and a website.

Methods: A hundred individuals aged ≥ 65 years were interviewed, which were patients of FHU Santa Maria, Rio Tinto, Porto district. Descriptive analyses were made and a logistic regression analysis was used to estimate the association between the existence of falls in the last year and the behavior, risk condition/difficulties. The Odds Ratio (OR) and respective confidence intervals at 95% (95% CI) were calculated.

The materials for the prevention of falls were elaborated whilst taking into consideration four thematic areas: exercise, home safety, medication and sight, seeing as these are considered as the most effective actions in FP interventions. The website develops other important topics for the prevention of falls.

Results: the results obtained from the questionnaires showed that 46% of the elderly suffered a fall in one year, and from these, 11% suffered a fracture. Only 14% reported having receiving information about FP.

The adjusted OR (95% CI) was obtained for those who reported having more difficulties in sitting/lifting the toilet (OR = 6.12 (1.49; 25.07)) and to those who often position themselves on tiptoe, in order to reach objects that are out of reach (OR = 8.17 (1.38, 25.07)) who end up showing a higher risk of falling. In the analyses of the crude OR for the perception of the risk of falling, almost all variables within the category of difficulties declared values were statistically significant. However, the

same was not true when the adjusted OR (for age and sex) was calculated, thus concluding that people considered to be at risk of falling did not seem to avoid risky behaviors.

In parallel, to meet the second objective, four posters and a flyer directed to the elderly were developed. The flyer and posters were created based on the information made available at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and all materials follow the recommendations of graphical presentation and language suggested by the specialists of the FP and health education focused on the elderly. The content and presentation of the website are based on the latest guidelines for interventions in the elderly FP.

Discussion: The percentage of elderly who fell was higher than the internationally described. A small proportion of seniors reported receiving information about FP, justifying the importance of carrying out actions of health education for its prevention. The existing actions in Portugal have limitations that can compromise their effectiveness, such as poor accessibility to some materials, the existence of consecutive texts, extensive and hardly appealing for their reading. Furthermore, the number of actions and precautions is very low, although it is a problem with large magnitude, as was established with the results obtained from questionnaires. This work, by developing content for FP materials, aims to fill this gap and thereby contribute to the dissemination of information on falls and their prevention, so that older people recognize the risk factors and can make decisions that protect them against these, thus contributing to their health and wellness.