#allofusimprove
and be outstanding

NHS
South West
Yorkshire Partnership
NHS Foundation Trust

Seeing a fall in falls – environmental checklist keeps service users safer
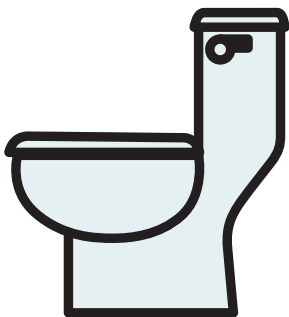
The background

Falls are the most frequently reported adult inpatient clinical incident and are a significant patient safety challenge for the NHS. There are more than 240,000 falls reported (Royal College of Physicians, 2022) in acute hospitals and mental health trusts in England and Wales every year – over 600 a day.

A fall can also happen at any time of life. A review of falls data in the Trust reported that most falls are linked to increasing frailty, age, and loss of balance. There was also a higher percentage of service users with dementia, Parkinson's disease, agitation, and associated prescribed medications that can have a sedative effect, increasing the chances of having a fall. Service users with dementia fall twice as often as the general older population.

All falls have an effect

The effects of falls can range from no harm to serious injury and death. However, even those falls that do not result in serious harm can cause a great deal of distress, particularly for those who are elderly and/or frail, resulting in consequences

that can threaten an individual's independence and prolong the length of time a service user is required to stay in hospital.

Our commitment and actions

Our Trust is committed to ensuring that our inpatient environments are maintained to a high standard and remain safe, not only for the service users, their families and visitors, but for our staff. To support this, we developed an environmental checklist for falls prevention.

The environmental checklist is designed to be completed annually or when a change of environment is noted, but it is also designed to encourage action planning which may include updates to the environment or ensuring new staff have completed their falls awareness training.

The generic environmental checklist covers the entire ward environment and grounds where service users, families and staff spend their time. It has been developed and designed to support a structured discussion and review of inpatient wards and units, encouraging identification and management of potential risks within our environment.

It is a simple tick box design to make it as quick and easy as possible, with a box to complete if action needs to be taken.
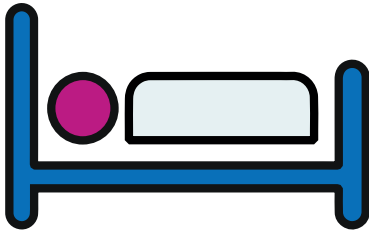
Areas covered

Bathroom and shower rooms: These areas can cause slip, trips and falls hazards. The checklist explores how these areas are decorated to help people with dementia who may struggle with recognising depth/height and objects. The toilet seat height is important too – having a low toilet seat height means that people have to lower themselves down further, increasing the likelihood of slipping. Making sure that there are grab rails, good lighting and non-slip mats and floors also supports people to stay safe.

Passageways/Corridors: These areas can often be where our service users walk/pace if they feel restless. When people pace for long periods and have prescribed medication it can increase the risk of tiredness, dizziness, balance changes and falls. Making sure carpeting is not worn, hand rails are available and good lighting is key to reducing falls risks.

Common dining area: Making sure dining rooms are free from clutter, spillages are cleared as soon as they are seen, and chairs/tables being kept to a good standard is very important to reduce falls.

Common lounges: When service users sit for longer periods, it can affect blood pressure and potentially lead to dizziness. The checklist asks if grab rails are in place where needed and good lighting is available.

Our partners have been so impressed with this work that they have implemented it on their own wards.

well lit

Bedrooms: These areas can often be where the most unwitnessed falls occur. If service have been laid down for a longer period or had night-time medication it can increase dizziness. Checking for good or additional lighting in bedrooms is important.

External areas: Outdoor areas and gardens can often deteriorate due to poor weather conditions. Surfaces become slippery and trip hazards can lead to potential risks. Steps and poor lighting can also lead to hazards. The checklist reminds people to be considerate of this.
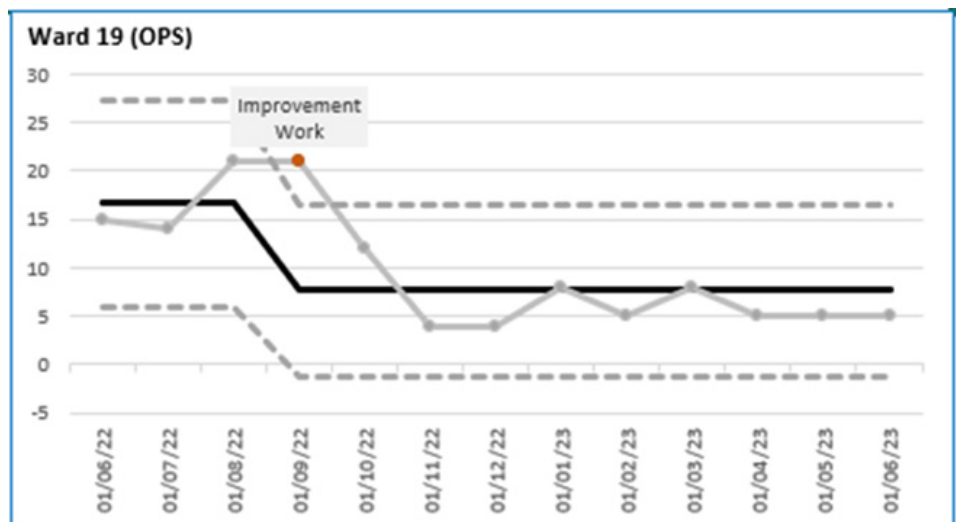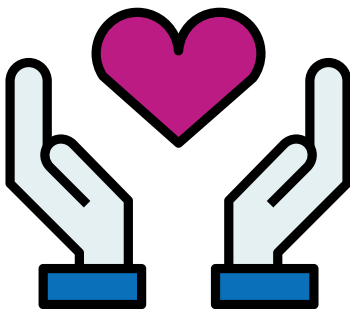
We also support and assess people for falls risks daily

and implement appropriate care plans. The checklist helps people identify if staff are considering service user footwear, glasses etc, and are making sure service users are using the correct equipment.

The checklist also helps staff to ensure that they are up to date on their learning.

Sharing good practice

The Trust shared the falls environmental checklist with colleagues from Doncaster and Bassettlaw Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, and Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust. They were impressed with the work, so trialled it on their own wards.

It has been so successful, that they have decided to complete this type of falls checklist on all their own wards twice yearly, and expressed their gratitude for the hard work put into creating this important resource.

Ward 19 (OPS)

Graph showing a decrease in falls on ward 19 in Dewsbury following the improvement work.

If you require a copy of this information in any other format or language please contact your line manager or healthcare worker at the Trust.

With **all of us** in mind.