Reviewer’s report

Title: Can volunteer companions prevent falls among inpatients?: A pre-post comparative design.

Version: Date: 31 March 2006

Reviewer: Judith Donoghue

Reviewer’s report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Figure 1 shows that in May 2002 and April 2003 a falls rate of over 20 per 1,000 bed days in a month. These are very high averages. The Eastern Australian average is 14-15 falls per 1,000 bed days per month in public hospitals. The reasons for these “surges” need to be explained because a) the other months are showing results more consistent with known falls rates; b) no patients fell when the volunteers were present; c) there is no mention of multiple fallers or what else was happening with patients in other parts of the wards to the safety bays.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

The non-significant results for days of the week and over time have been appropriately analysed and reported. The times of day comparisons (blocks of four hours) have not been reported although this variable has been identified under ‘monitoring and evaluation’ (p7).

While the context and procedural descriptions are good, there is no explanation for why the research included two public hospitals and two wards managing (apparently) different patient types. The researchers could clarify why different methods of assessing and identifying patients at high risk for a fall were used. For example that patients with dementia/behavioural problems could not be assessed using STRATIFY.

No information given about possible impact of historical effects at both hospitals with the year separation of data – for example differences in staff numbers and profile or casemix.

The researchers have not explained why they choose to evaluate difference only for four months. Thirteen of the 45 volunteers (nearly 30%) left during the implementation leaving “big gaps” in the observation schedules. Knowing why volunteers were not retained is an important outcome for readers who might consider this intervention.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.