

Addressing Falls and Fear of Falling in Older Adults

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An older adult falls about every 3 seconds in the United States, resulting in significant morbidity and mortality. Falls are the leading cause of injury deaths among older adults, and result in a significant number of visits to health care providers, emergency rooms, and hospitalizations. Lach became interested in the topic while participating on an interdisciplinary research project studying the causes and outcomes of falls. With the graying of the population, and the frequency of falls, a public health crisis is looming that impacts every setting. The need for interventions to help older adults prevent or reduce falls is critical. In particular, older adults need education and skills to take steps to reduce their risks of falling, and health professionals need education to support them.

Lach recognized the need for nurse researchers to address factors related to this critical problem and returned to school for a research doctorate. Lach received a pre-doctoral fellowship from the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) to explore fear of falling, a risk factor for falls. To further her research work, Lach received a fellowship funded by the John A. Hartford Building Academic Geriatric Capacity program to explore dementia caregivers' perceptions of falls and safety problems. The opportunities for mentoring from nursing research experts provided by this fellowship helped Lach formulate a program of research. She set forth to pursue this plan and last year obtained funding to test an education and coaching intervention for fear of falling in older adults with funding from NINR.

Lach teaches content on falls to graduate and undergraduate students, as well as through continuing education offerings. She is participating in *Show Me Falls Free*, an initiative to promote fall reduction in the state of Missouri along with the national *Falls Free Coalition* at the National Council on Aging. Her goal is to increase awareness of falls among nurses and other health professionals nationwide so they can make a difference in reducing falls in older adults.

Dr. Lach is Associate Professor at Saint Louis University School of Nursing. She was a Building Academic Geriatric Nursing Capacity Fellow from 2003-2005.

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