

# Falls and Hospitalized Patients With Cancer: A Review of the Literature

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Preventing falls continues to be a serious issue faced by hospitals. Several studies have demonstrated an increased need for safety in hospitalized patients with cancer compared to other hospitalized populations. In addition, several fall-prevention studies in hospital settings have reported high rates of falls and injuries in this population. A cancer diagnosis is a significant risk factor for falling; however, few hospital studies have examined patients with cancer independently to determine why they are at greater risk for falls and injuries. Patients with cancer are a unique population because cancer treatments can cause side effects that may increase fall risk. Falls also can cause significant morbidity and mortality. More research is needed to better understand what specific oncology risk factors contribute to falls in the hospital setting.

**M**uch research has been conducted in the hospital setting to reduce falls and prevent serious injury (Chu et al., 1999; Fischer et al., 2005; Hendrich, Nyhuis, Kippenbrock, & Soja, 1995; Hitcho et al., 2004; Krauss et al., 2005, 2007; Lakatos et al., 2009; McCarter-Bayer, Bayer, & Hall, 2005; Morgan, Mathison, Rice, & Clemmer, 1985; O'Connell, Baker, Gaskin, & Hawkins, 2007; O'Connell, Cockayne, Wellman, & Baker, 2005; Pautex, Hermann, & Zulian, 2008; Rhode, Myers, & Vlahov, 1990; Stevenson, Mills, Welin, & Beal, 1998), as falls are commonly reported in hospitals (Institute for Healthcare Improvement, n.d.). Several studies have shown that having a cancer diagnosis may be linked to falls (Alcee, 2000; Chu et al. 1999; Fischer et al., 2005; Hendrich et al., 1995; Hitcho et al., 2004; Lakatos et al., 2009; O'Connell et al., 2005; Rhode et al., 1990; Stevenson et al., 1998), but few studies have investigated fall prevention solely in patients with cancer (Overcash, 2007; Pautex et al., 2008; Pearce & Ryan, 2008); of those three studies, only two were conducted in the inpatient setting. As a result, this article aims to report the current literature on falls in patients with cancer to assist healthcare professionals who work with this unique population.

A literature search was conducted using CINAHL®, PubMed, MEDLINE®, and PsycINFO databases. The key words that resulted in the most productive searches were *fall prevention*, *hospital falls*, *falls and hospitals*, and *cancer and falls*. Inclusion criteria used for the search were adult participants, inpatient hospital

## At a Glance

- ◆ Few studies to date have provided specific information about fall-related injuries in hospitalized patients with cancer.
- ◆ Identification of risk factors can facilitate the development of fall-prevention strategies for patients with cancer.
- ◆ Nurse, patient, and family education about fall risk may prevent injuries and improve quality of life in this population.

setting, English language, and any time frame and location. The review sought to determine what research exists to date that explores the phenomenon of hospitalized patients with cancer and fall prevention, and to determine what characteristics of those patients may place them at risk for falls. Identifying risk factors can be complex because patients with cancer may concurrently experience many common characteristics described in this article. Ten studies met inclusion criteria (see Table 1).

## Patients With Cancer and Hospital Fall-Prevention Studies

Only two studies were found that reported exclusively about patients with cancer and falls in the hospital setting. Pearce and

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