INTRODUCTION

Falls and postural stability

Instability, with the resulting liability to falling, is considered to be one of the original ‘Geriatric Giants’. The large economic burden caused by the consequences of falls have made this subject topical, given the demand on limited budgets in Health and Social Services departments. The White Paper ‘Saving Lives—Our Healthier Nation’ has as one of its aims to reduce death rates caused by accidents by at least a fifth by the year 2010. Having a significant impact on falls in older people is an important component in this goal and local Health Improvement Programmes are having to face up to the challenge. It is in this context that the first United Kingdom National conference on Falls and Postural Stability was organized in September 2000 to bring together expertise on the subject from a variety of backgrounds.

This Age and Ageing supplement is composed of review articles on some of the important topics which were discussed at the above conference. Firstly, the epidemiology of falls is discussed with particular emphasis on problems created by the differing definitions of falls and fallers. This is followed by an evidence-based review of fall preventative strategies, which have been developed up to the present time. Reviews on the important subjects of cardiovascular causes of falls, visual problems and falls and the relationship between falls and fractures are also included. Finally two articles on the effects of physical activity and exercise on postural stability and fracture prevention highlight the importance of older people keeping themselves as physically fit as possible.

The National Service Framework for Older People and the American Geriatrics Society/British Geriatrics Society/American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons Guidelines on falls are important recent publications. It is hoped that this supplement will be a useful source to complement these documents.

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