WHAT DO PATIENTS WEAR ON THEIR FEET? A SERVICE EVALUATION OF FOOTWEAR IN ELDERLY PATIENTS (STEP)

C. D. Vass1, C. Edwards1, A. Smith1, O. Sahota2, A. Drummond1
1School of Health Sciences, University of Nottingham
2Health Care of the Older Person, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust

Background: Assessment of footwear is recommended as an important component of falls prevention programmes, and recommendations have been made, such as low heeled shoes to reduce falls. However there are no UK or international standardised guidelines to advise nurses about appropriate footwear for older people. Scant data exists to show what older inpatients typically wear in hospital during acute admissions, which may hinder development of future interventions in this high risk falls group. To address this omission, we conducted a service evaluation to observe what older inpatients were wearing on their feet, and patient and staff perceptions about footwear.

Sampling methods: Patients who had been admitted to six health care of the older person wards in an Acute NHS Trust in England participated in a survey of footwear. Patients and nurses were interviewed about choices and current practices. Footwear was assessed using the Footwear Assessment Tool.

Results: 730 pairs of footwear, from 675 patients, were assessed. 273 (40%) patients were barefoot at observation. The most common footwear worn were slippers (46%) and gripper socks (37%). Much of the footwear had a good fit, but over 50% lacked adequate structure, stability and support. More than 60% had no cushioning and 60% had no fixation. Footwear was commonly more than 12 months old (60%) with signs of moderate to excess wear. Features such as grip, structure, and support were identified as important qualities. Patients valued comfort and the familiarity of their own footwear.

Conclusions: This service evaluation provides information on current footwear worn by older inpatients during an acute hospital admission in the UK, which has not been previously reported. Many inpatients are wearing footwear with insufficient structure to promote optimal stability or gait. There are discrepancies between perceptions and practice. Providing safe footwear suitable for use in hospital is potentially a low technology resource-efficient way to promote patient safety in older inpatients.