

A Note from Executive Director, Vicki Hickman

Reflections From Our Executive Director

Those of you who have read my past articles may remember that I am a notorious fall risk. My falls have resulted in a few broken bones, torn ligaments, and multiple sprains. As a child, my father nicknamed me “Grace”. My husband frets every time I fall and injure myself, fearing people I work with will think I am an abused wife! I assure him that everyone already knows how clumsy I am, since I have fallen at work a few times too.

Two years ago, I began a rigorous fitness routine, which included strength training, core work, aerobics, and yoga. One of my goals was to improve my balance and stability to reduce my falls, which at that point occurred monthly.

Over the past 18 months I have steadily decreased my falls. I had a bad fall from my bicycle in April and it was months before my bruising went away. Since then, I’ve been stable. I had a few slips and near misses during the recent snowstorms, but I was able to steady myself to keep from falling. Honestly, I was really feeling proud of my ability to stay upright. It had been 9 months since my last fall!

A couple of weeks ago, that changed. I spent the weekend babysitting my adorable (and now very active) 12-month-old grandson. After dropping him off at his parent’s house, I came home to relax. I took a bath, put on my most comfy PJs, and put on my house slippers. Then I proceeded to gather everything I needed and headed downstairs. My hands were full, with two phones, my water bottle, and my iPad (why make another trip to collect these things, right?). I headed downstairs and on the 2nd step down, my slippered foot slipped right out from under me. Suddenly I found myself gliding down the steps, as if going down a slide, or sledding on a snowy hill. However, instead of gliding down with ease, I was hitting every step with my tailbone and there was no stopping me. I held onto all of my precious things and knew it would be over soon. I hit the landing with a thump and took a few moments to do a body check. Overall, I was ok, but it soon became clear I had likely broken my coccyx (the tailbone). I knew this, because twenty years ago, I fell while rollerblading and broke my coccyx at that time. Unfortunately, there is nothing that can be done about that, it just takes time, and it will heal. Last time, it was at least 6 months before the pain subsided.

As a risk manager, I know how important it is to do a root-cause analysis with every fall. It didn’t take but a few seconds to know the fall was a result of improper footwear. I knew better and in fact I purposefully avoided wearing these slippers all weekend, since I was carrying my grandson. Instead, I wore my Skechers Slip-ons, (which I highly recommend). The other contributing factor was the fact that I was unable to use the handrail, due to having my hands full. Had I been holding on; I could have stopped myself from going down. Needless to say, I threw those slippers right in the trash.

I feel so fortunate. This could have been much worse. But the experience is a stark reminder that I can fall at any time, and I must be mindful and as vigilant about my own safety as I am about my grandson’s. I know better than most how one fall can change your life. As we age, the likelihood of falls increases; and the likelihood of serious injuries also increases. There is nothing more important than our own health. In order to serve others, we must take care of ourselves first! We all experience falls at one time or another. If we take that seriously, figure out the cause, and take action, we can potentially prevent those life-changing falls.

This experience made me think of many of our residents here. I want to encourage those of you who fall, or are afraid of falling, to utilize your resources. Do you know that fear of falling increases your risk of falling? Please come see us and let us help with this. Report your falls, or fear of such. We have resources such as Virtusense, therapy, The Connection, TrueSense, and Marcia, our highly valued clinic nurse. A fall doesn’t have to lead to a move through the continuum, sometimes it can be a catalyst for a healthier, more active life!

-Vicki