

Eat Walk Engage: Helping older patients to a faster recovery

Our great grandmothers knew some of the secrets to recovering from illness...a walk outside, chicken soup, a good book. Research now supports these simple strategies.

Getting up and going, regular meals and meaningful activities to keep the mind active are recognised as important interventions for older people in hospital. They reduce serious complications of hospitalisation, such as falls, pressure injuries and delirium.

Unfortunately, research also shows that older people eat poorly in hospital, and spend most of their time in bed, bored and alone.

A focus on technology, hectic staff schedules, increased patient numbers, complex teams and poor hospital design are some of the barriers to ensuring older patients get the care interventions they need.

The Eat Walk Engage (EWE) program at RBWH is supporting ward teams to help their older patients to a faster and better recovery in hospital.

The programme developed as collaboration between Departments of Internal Medicine and Aged Care, Nutrition and Dietetics, Physiotherapy and the Safety and Quality Unit.

Professor Alison Mudge, who leads the team, said the team was passionate about improving hospital care for older patients.

“We work with each ward to try to help them understand their systems and barriers to delivering the processes of care that we know make a real difference to older people in hospital, like helping them to take a walk three times a day or having access to the news. Every ward is different, and we are learning as we go.

“As the program grows we share successful strategies between wards.”

Professor Mudge said careful evaluation of the first two wards to implement EWE showed how these small changes can make a big difference to patients.

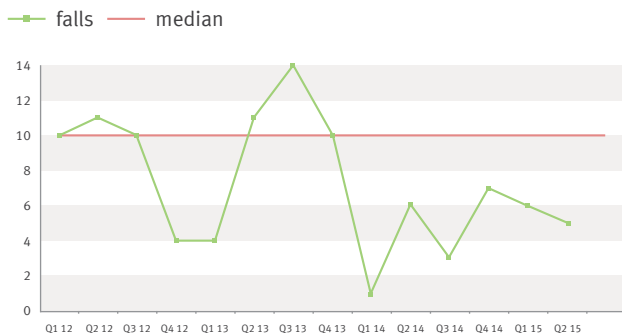
“The challenge now is to grow and sustain our program, and to work towards a truly older person friendly hospital,” Professor Mudge said.

The team has obtained a prestigious Queensland Accelerate Partnership Grant in partnership with Metro North HHS, Sunshine Coast HHS and QUT Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation to evaluate Eat Walk Engage in four hospitals, and ensure the programme remains underpinned by strong evidence.

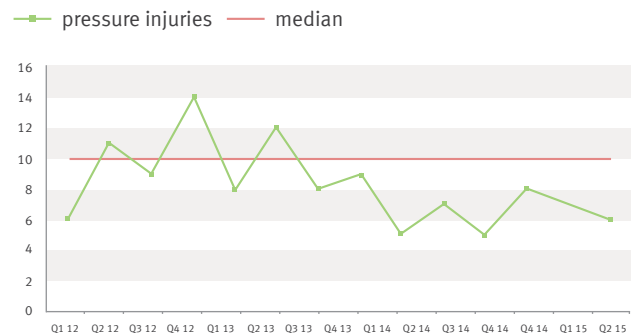
The trial will support the group’s growing international reputation as leading researchers in acute hospital care of older patients.

Following implementation of Eat Walk Engage on the vascular surgical ward in 2013, there has been a sustained reduction in falls and pressure injuries

Number of falls (per three months) in older patients, 7BW



Number of pressure injuries (per three months) in older patients, 7BW





Improvements in mobility and mealtime assistance were accompanied by a **20%** reduction in length of stay in older patients and fewer falls. **{ Medical Ward 9B }**

10% reduction in length of stay **25%** fewer patients requiring convalescent care **30%** fewer geriatric syndromes (delirium, falls and pressure injuries) **{ Vascular Surgical Ward }**



Above: Patients, staff and volunteers from the Oncology ward share morning tea and conversation out in the fresh air.