



JENNIFER GRIMES, TRIBUNE

EVALUATION: Vestibular certified physical therapist Connie Weglarz helps 83-year-old Margaret Frey, of Scottsdale, balance herself during a physical therapy session on the NeuroCom Balance Manager at Scottsdale Healthcare Outpatient Services on Friday. The screen in front of Frey, as well as to the side of the machine, shows a group of red squares and an icon representing her. When a square turns yellow, Frey is supposed to shift her weight to move the icon into that square.

Groups aim to prevent deaths from falls

Spills among top causes of serious injuries in seniors

By JULIE JANOVSKY
 TRIBUNE

Falling is one of the top causes of serious injury among those aged 65 and older.

And for nearly 16,000 people in the U.S. in 2005, falls proved fatal, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Locally, 441 people in Maricopa County died in 2006 with a fall cited as the underlying cause of death, the county Department of Public Health reported.

The good news, experts say, is that seniors can take preventive measures to reduce their odds of falling.

Scottsdale Healthcare, the Scottsdale Fire Department and Scottsdale senior centers offer seniors health screenings to assess their risk.

Six months ago, the Scottsdale Fire Department launched

By the numbers

- Arizona ranked fifth-highest in the U.S. for fall-related deaths in 2005.
- More than 1 out of 3 adults 65 and older fall every year.
- Falls are more common than strokes, and the consequences can be just as serious.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Resources

- www.scottsdaleaz.gov/fire/2fit2fall/Home_Safe_Home or (480) 312-1815
- www.shc.org

their free "Home Safe Home" visits, designed to assess a resident's risk.

"We ask health questions and walk through their homes to determine their risk," said Patty Jo Angelini, public education officer with the Scottsdale Fire Department.

Angelini said the visits, set up by appointment, typically last between 45 minutes and an hour. The two-member team looks for obstacles inside and outside the home, especially any trouble spots between the bedrooms and bathrooms.

The team will identify clutter or other items that should

be removed and suggest items that should be added, such as grab bars, ramps or stair lifts, depending on the situation.

As part of the program, residents are briefed on safety issues and given night lights and referrals to nonprofit groups for assistance in obtaining items such as grab bars and 911 phones (if they don't have a cell phone). Angelini said a lockbox can also be set up so emergency responders can enter the home if a senior falls and is unable to get up.

For seniors worried about their health risk for falling, Scottsdale Healthcare's Bal-

ance and Mobility Center, about a mile south of the company's Osborn Campus, offers balance screenings.

Using a machine that features technology developed by NASA, patients' sensory and motor skills are tested as their balance is being challenged.

Patients are also given a strength test, have their walk analyzed and are screened for inner-ear problems, which can cause dizziness or instability, said Amy Ariss, a clinical audiologist at the Balance and Mobility Center. Additional physical therapy sessions can be arranged on-site to help seniors improve their balance.

Ariss said the services that she and the center's physical therapist, Connie Weglarz, provide are typically covered by insurance.

Patients first must obtain a referral from their primary care physician.

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