Research Priority: Safety and Injury Prevention

Safety and injury prevention is a priority area across the lifespan, in home, clinical, and community settings. Many examples exist of areas in great need of more effective interventions and improved outcomes.

- Each year, 2.5 million older people are treated in emergency departments for fall injuries. In the United States, the direct medical costs for fall injuries are $34 billion annually.
- Age-related declines in vision and cognitive functioning, as well as physical changes, may affect some older adult’s driving abilities. In 2012, more than 5,560 older adults were killed and more than 214,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes.
- For many older adults and those with multiple co-morbidities, the ability to remain independent in one’s home depends on the ability to manage a complicated medication regimen. Approximately 30% of hospital admissions of older adults are drug related, with more than 11% attributed to medication nonadherence and 10–17% related to adverse drug reactions. Older adults discharged from the hospital on more than five drugs are more likely to visit the emergency department and be rehospitalized during the first 6 months after discharge.
- In 2010, 2.5 million traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) occurred across the lifespan as an isolated injury or along with other injuries. More research is needed to prevent TBIs and to help people better recognize, respond and recover if a TBI occurs.

Urgent Need

Safety and injury prevention has been identified as
- a critical issue for promoting health and well-being for many conditions and populations
- an area in which evidence-based measures and interventions are needed
- an area that is perfectly suited for more involvement by the unique skills of occupational therapy

The OT Lens

Injuries happen when people are “doing everyday activities” and when health professionals are “doing their job responsibilities”. The occupational therapy lens on injuries and safety is a comprehensive understanding of “doing” and the requisite skills of people and features of the environment that support “safe doing”.

In the area of safety and injury prevention, current knowledge, research training, measures and interventions are inadequate for addressing participation and health issues. AOTF is committed to the development of a scientific network and body of evidence-based knowledge to achieve effective and efficient advances in occupational therapy science for the area of safety and injury prevention in home, clinical, and community settings.

Opportunity to Affect Progress

There are a few occupational therapy scientists who are building knowledge related to safety and injury prevention. However, there is not a coordinated network for occupational therapy research in this area, nor sufficient resources to train more occupational therapy researchers and practitioners. We believe a significant investment is needed in order to improve safety and decrease or better treat injuries across the lifespan in order to have better outcomes and improve quality of life.