

Dr. Rita Wong Speaks on Falls Prevention

Dr. Rita Wong, Ed.D., P.T., FAPTA, spoke at the March 11 Village Quarterly Meeting on “Why Is Fall Prevention Important?” She noted that falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries. Approximately 30% of older adults fall each year; 20% of those falls cause serious injury. She stated that falls are “typically not caused by just one issue.” Some of the internal risk factors are: advanced age, previous falls, muscle weakness, gait and balance problems, poor vision, fear of falling, dizziness, chronic medical conditions, changes in sensation in legs or feet, urinary urgency, and low blood pressure on standing. Some of the environmental causes are not having handrails or grab bars, dim lighting, improper use of a cane or walker, distracting environment, obstacles and tripping hazards, throw rugs, slippery floor surfaces, uneven surfaces and certain medications.

One of the issues is that “receiving and integrating sensory input slows down as we age.” On the bright side, Dr. Wong said that “in almost every case we can improve balance.” She suggested that individuals talk to their health care provider if they feel unsteady or are concerned about falling. The health care provider may check the medications being taken and might recommend a physical therapist. Another preventative measure is to have a yearly eye exam. And, it is very important to “keep moving.” Dr. Wong recommends beginning “an exercise program to improve strength, flexibility and balance.”

Dr. Wong explained that both strength and balance are necessary to prevent falls. She recommended three evidence-based fall prevention programs: Stay Active and Independent for Life (which has been given at Providence Rec Center and Lincolnia Senior Center); A Matter of Balance (sometimes given at Lincolnia), and the Otago Exercise Program. For more information, she recommended looking at the web site novafallsprevention.com