

INPATIENT VESTIBULAR SCREENING PILOT STUDY

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Situation

Our physiotherapy team hypothesised that many patients admitted to hospital with a falls history, may have vestibular deficits overlooked, if symptoms of vertigo are unreported. Vertigo symptoms can be absent, and therefore unreported, due to: reduced movement, speed, age, fear, learned avoidance, bilateral vestibular hypofunction or presbyvestibulopathy. In 2020, vestibular agnosia appeared in the literature, and research supports the likelihood of a high prevalence of vestibular disorders in fallers. To date, the screening of hospital-admitted, non-dizzy fallers and their vestibular function, has not been reported.

Action

In late 2023, we proposed a standard of care for our in-patients, involving vestibular screening for all patients who reported a history of falls in the previous 12 months, and a VST score <4/8. Four Physicians and the NUMs on two medical wards agreed with our guidelines.

Fallers admitted to these two wards were screened for VST. Patients with a VST score <4/8 were then referred for vestibular screening. Outcome measures included assessments of: oculomotor and VOR function including vHIT, positional testing, balance and gait parameters.

Outcome

To date we have obtained data from 8 patients that who did not report symptoms of dizziness; 5 patients (62.5%) were positive for vestibular deficit. Although a small population, incidence matches the current literature. Of the 'positive patients', 60% met criteria for a unilateral vestibular hypofunction and 40% for bilateral vestibular hypofunction.

Recommendations

Our plan is to continue our standard of care for 2024, performing a full audit to inform best practice, and to demonstrate the need for vestibular screening for inpatients with a history of falls. Future research could use this data to correlate with other balance and vestibular measures, to identify patients who would benefit from vestibular assessment when they are not reporting vertigo. Detection and treatment of vestibular-related falls risks can significantly impact on patients' lives and on the healthcare system.