

**Assessment and care of elderly woman following a fall
16HDC01467, 13 May 2019**

Retirement village ~ Fall ~ Fracture ~ Assessment of pain ~ Right 4(1)

An elderly woman was a resident at a retirement village for several years.

It was identified that the woman was experiencing difficulty in standing. An internal review found that at some time between 7am and 10am that day, the woman had had an unwitnessed fall that had not been reported. However, the timing of this incident is disputed by the woman's family. There was a delay in caregivers informing nursing staff of the change in the woman's condition, and no incident report was completed.

The following day, the woman complained of right leg pain and later right arm pain. A registered nurse noted that the woman was for review by a doctor, but the doctor was not asked to see the woman that day.

The next day, two caregivers were using a transfer belt to move the woman, as she was unable to stand unassisted and weight bear. During the transfer, the belt unclipped and the woman lost her balance and was lowered to the ground. Following this incident, the woman's pain escalated. At 1pm she was seen by a GP, who noted that she had trauma to the elbow, pain on movement of her right leg, and a tender knee. The GP recommended that the woman be taken to hospital for further investigation.

An ambulance was called at 4.15pm, and the woman was taken to hospital, where she had X-rays of all affected areas and was diagnosed with a left elbow fracture. The woman was transferred back to the retirement village at 8.30pm, with instructions to continue her regular pain relief regimen; however, this did not occur.

The woman's pain became worse over the following days, and she was taken to hospital again by ambulance. She remained in hospital, and a CT scan showed pubic rami fractures that had not been visible via X-ray, and a torn rotator cuff and soft tissue injury to the right shoulder. Sadly, the woman's condition deteriorated and she died.

Findings

It was found that there were serious issues with the care the woman received from multiple staff members. In particular:

- a) There was a delay in the woman being seen by the GP once her change in condition was known by nursing staff, and there was no update to the woman's care plan in light of her changed mobility.
- b) The assessment of the woman's level of pain was lacking, and there were multiple issues with her medication regimen.
- c) The change in the woman's condition was not documented appropriately on an incident form by any staff, and the initial fall was not disclosed or reported.

- d) There was a three-hour delay between the GP review recommending transfer to hospital, and the ambulance being called to take the woman to hospital.
- e) There were deficiencies in multiple aspects of documentation of the woman's care.
- f) When the woman was lifted off the floor, the two caregivers failed to use a full body hoist in accordance with the manual handling policy.
- g) The communication with the woman's family about their concerns, and the woman's condition, should have been managed better.

In light of these issues, it was found that the care provided to the woman by the retirement village was inadequate. Accordingly, the retirement village did not provide services to the woman with reasonable care and skill, and breached Right 4(1).

The Deputy Commissioner is satisfied that there have been positive changes made to the service provided at the retirement village since these events.

Recommendations

It was recommended that the facility report to HDC on further education provided to its staff, and improvements to its service in the areas of medication administration documentation; the process to support the use of restraint and restraint use documentation; incident reporting; and the process of seeking medical attention and transferring a resident's care to a secondary/tertiary hospital.

It was also recommended that the facility use this case study to provide continuing education to caregiving and nursing staff, and provide a written apology to the woman's family.