

President Jimmy Carter's Falls and Traumatic Brain Injury: Lessons for the Rest of US
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CBS News reported on Nov 12, 2019 that America's oldest president, Jimmy Carter, who recently turned 95 years old, had sustained 3 falls in 2019: one in May leading to a hip fracture and two in October leading to head trauma and a minor pelvic fracture. As a result of these falls, President Carter developed severe swelling around his brain, requiring surgery to relieve the pressure. Sometimes, a brain injury can cause blood vessels to rupture, resulting in blood entering the skull cavity and forming a blood clot also known as a hematoma. Even though hematomas often resolve without intervention, surgery may sometimes be needed when this blood clot causes too much pressure on the brain.

In this [video interview](#), President Carter describes the fall and his head injury, which occurred after getting up to go to church, with plans for a busy day ahead including a family reunion and travel from Georgia to Tennessee. The interview illustrated how easily and quickly a fall can happen for an older adult. We all pray that President Carter will have a speedy and complete recovery with no additional falls in the coming years.

However, his recent fall raised significant press conversation surrounding brain injury and older adult falls. Falls are the most common cause of brain injury in older adults. Older adults with prior falls are also at risk of future falls. According to the CDC STEADI guidelines, older adults with at least one traumatic fall a year or two non-traumatic falls are at high risk of future falls. Falls are also the number one cause of hip fractures in older adults.

The good news is that falls are preventable. The US Senate Special Committee on Aging composed recommendations in their October 2019 annual report on the future national direction to address this highly overlooked problem for our parents, grandparents, and loved ones. The recommendations included fall prevention education interventions to raise awareness, improving screening and referrals for those at risk of falls, and targeting modifiable risk factors via medication management, physical mobility, and home and environmental safety interventions. These services should be delivered via a multi-disciplinary team-based approach, because preventing falls requires the patient's entire care team.

These statistics challenged us to found Baltimore's Steady Strides: Fall Prevention and Stroke Rehabilitation Medical Institute, the nation's only comprehensive medical fall prevention program. We developed a rehabilitative program based on biomechanics and in-depth knowledge that bridges multiple medical specialties. This unique approach is exactly what the Senate report is recommending - using multidisciplinary knowledge rather than a single discipline. In other words, rather than a patient navigating multiple medical specialists, with each using their own separate diagnosis and treatment, there is one destination utilizing all the related knowledge. Our patients see improvement in a short time with a rehab program combining medical management, physical therapy, physical mobility interventions, and occupational therapies.

According to the Special Committee on Aging Report, fall-related deaths among seniors have almost tripled since 2000. Every 19 minutes, an older adult dies from fall-related injuries. These statistics are staggering, and the stakes are high. This is an epidemic that needs to be curtailed. Individuals, communities, and governments must work together to reduce falls risk among older adults and put a stop to this growing epidemic.

*** Disclaimer: Steady Strides is a comprehensive fall prevention, balance, gait, stroke and brain injury rehabilitation medical institute. We provide medical, physical and occupational therapy services, actively engage in research, educational and public health initiatives with State of Maryland, Baltimore City and Baltimore County, as well as serve on national committees. The 2019 Senate Committee recommendations on fall prevention in older adults cited above were culled from national expert recommendations and Steady Strides was one of the sites quarried.

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