

Therapeutic Falls Case Example

Ms. X is a 70 year old female who is recovering on an inpatient rehabilitation unit following a stroke. She lives alone, has always been fiercely independent, and insists on going to the bathroom without assistance. She currently requires supervision for ambulation using a 4-wheel walker.

She tells her rehabilitation team, *“I know I could fall and break my hip, but no way am I going to let someone watch me go to the bathroom if I can help it! It’s not like someone is going to do it for me when I get home. I only have a nephew as family and he lives in another city.”*

The team wants to keep Ms. X safe, but they also want to encourage her mobility so that she will meet her fast-approaching goal of returning to live at home on her own. They decide to explore Therapeutic Falls with Ms. X.

Ms. X has a discussion with her PT, physiatrist and OT about her preference to be more independent for toileting. She understands the risks of increasing mobility including hitting her head. She is given alternatives such as a bedside commode or female urinal. Her PT talks to her about how to prevent falls, but also what to do in the event of a fall to reduce injury. Ms. X thinks about the discussed risks, benefits and strategies to reduce her risk, and decides she will try to use the toilet on her own during the day, but ask for help at night, initially. The conversation is documented and Ms. X is given a copy of the shared-decision making guide the team had reviewed with her using elements of teach-back.

Two days later, Ms. X falls on her way to the bathroom.

Her rehabilitation team discusses the fall at huddle the next morning. Her physiatrist also investigates any changes to her health status that may have contributed to the fall, such as a new infection. Her Nurse and OT discuss with Ms. X whether she would like to continue with or amend her plan, as well as what she learned from the fall. She thinks she should give herself more time when she feels tired and not wear her slippers after all. In preparation for her return home, Ms. X chooses to continue trying to ambulate to the bathroom and use the toilet independently. The team follows the same post-fall processes as they would with any fall, however, this fall is documented as a “therapeutic” fall.