Structured inspection and audit program for walking aids

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Introduction
Walking aids are prescribed by physiotherapist to provide a sturdy support for patients during ambulation. Incidents such as broken walking frame which may lead to patient fall occasional happened. The reasons of the incidents may be multifactorial relating to metal fatigue or its improper use. Physiotherapists in the three hospitals under Kowloon Central Cluster (KCC) prescribed more than 3,000 walking aids annually.

Objectives
(1) Ensure patient safety and prevent potential patient fall (2) Ensure quality and safe use of walking aids (3) Promote reporting of “near-miss” culture

Methodology
Using explicit criteria based audit approach, a structured inspection and audit program for walking aids was implemented. All walking aids (frames, rollators, quadripods, elbow crutches and sticks) prescribed or used by physiotherapists in the hospitals were included. The program included 1) a safety checklist developed for each walking aid, 2) scheduled safety inspection by supporting staff, 3) regular audit by physiotherapists and 4) education session on safe and proper use of prescribed walking aids for patients and caregivers by physiotherapists. The safety checklist and inspection schedule were kept inside a small plastic pocket hung onto each walking aid. Walking aids were inspected for defects by supporting staff and signed. An educational pamphlet was developed as a handy reference.

Result
A total of 1,258 serving walking aids were inspected. Three “near-miss” were reported - two walking frames and one stick were found to have defects and were replaced. Zero incidents concerning use of walking aids were observed. Education sessions and pamphlets were provided to 1,628 patients and their caregivers. Supporting staff could perform regular maintenance of walking aids in an easy and structured step-by-step manner. The quality of the walking aids was ensured. Patient and caregivers welcomed direct detailed coaching by physiotherapists. The program was integrated into the practice of the physiotherapy departments subsequently. Implementation of a structured inspection and audit program can successfully reduce potential patient incidents through identification of “near-miss”. Culture of “near-miss” reporting is promoted. Zero incident happened in Physiotherapy Departments of KCC. Proactive measure similar to this program should be rolled out to other clinical procedures to ensure quality and enhance patient safety.