



## A multidisciplinary approach to improve the quality of care for patients with fragility fractures



Laura C. Lamb<sup>a,b</sup>, Stephanie C. Montgomery<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Brian Wong Won<sup>b</sup>, Siobhan Harder<sup>a</sup>, Jeffrey Meter<sup>a,b</sup>, James M. Feeney<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center, Department of Surgery, 114 Woodland Street, Hartford, CT 06103, USA

<sup>b</sup> University of Connecticut School of Medicine, 263 Farmington Avenue, Farmington, CT 06030, USA

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 19 December 2016

Accepted 12 March 2017

Available online 20 March 2017

#### Keywords:

Fragility fracture

TQIP

Performance improvement

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Fragility fractures have become a worldwide epidemic associated with significant morbidity and mortality. As the world population ages, the number of patients that experience these fractures is also expected to rise. A multidisciplinary team was assembled that was coordinated by the Acute Inpatient Medical Service and included orthopedic surgeons, geriatricians, anesthesiologists, cardiologists, nurses, trauma surgeons, emergency medicine physicians, physiatrists, and physical therapists. This team was formed with the expectation that geriatric fragility fracture complications, specifically hip fractures, could be reduced by identifying and implementing best practices using guidelines from the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgery and those from the International Geriatric Fracture Society. **Methods:** We implemented a clinical pathway with a standardized approach with reduction in care variation and followed that by instituting performance improvement measures. The difference in outcome measurements as reported by TQIP for the year prior to implementation and the year following creation of the fragility fracture program was evaluated.

**Results:** Benchmarking data demonstrated improved outcomes for patients with fragility fractures. Length of stay was significantly below national average, mortality remained below national average, and complication rates for UTIs and pressure ulcers were both reduced from 2014 to 2015 and below the national average.

**Conclusion:** The clinical pathway we adopted for the care of patients with fragility fractures has resulted in reduced lengths of stay, below average mortality, and improved discharge disposition.

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### 1. Introduction

Fragility fractures have become a worldwide epidemic associated with significant morbidity and mortality. As the world's population ages, the number of patients that experience these fractures is also expected to rise. Fragility fractures are those that result from a standing height fall or less, or a fracture presenting without external evidence of trauma. These low energy fractures occur primarily in the elderly and predict future fractures. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2060, the number of Americans aged 65 and older is projected to more than double from 46 million in 2016 to 98 million in 2060.<sup>1</sup> As fracture incidence increases with age in both genders, and especially with older

women experiencing age-adjusted rates as high as 49%, this issue has the potential to become a tremendous burden on the health care system.<sup>2</sup> The creation of geriatric fracture programs to specifically address fragility has been studied and shown to be beneficial in returning patients to their activities of daily living and reducing future falls.<sup>3,4</sup>

The Trauma Quality Improvement Program (TQIP) is a prospectively collected database of the American College of Surgeons (ACS). Data is collected from member institutions, and benchmarking data is then returned to the institutions for performance improvement purposes. The program uses risk-adjusted benchmarking to provide each participating hospital with accurate national comparisons. Using our TQIP benchmarking data, we identified an opportunity to improve our care of patients with isolated hip fractures.

At our ACS Level II trauma center we assembled a multidisciplinary team, coordinated by the Academic Inpatient Medical

\* Corresponding author at: Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center, 114 Woodland Street, Hartford, CT 06103, USA.

E-mail address: [smontgom@stfranciscare.org](mailto:smontgom@stfranciscare.org) (S.C. Montgomery).

Service (AIMS) in order to develop optimal care pathways and to address any institutional barriers to providing care to elderly patients with an isolated hip fracture at our institution. This team included orthopedic surgeons, geriatricians, anesthesiologists, cardiologists, nurses, trauma surgeons, emergency medicine physicians, physiatrists, and physical therapists and was organized around the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) and the International Geriatric Fracture Society (IGFS) CORE certification guidelines, which encourage interdisciplinary care programs.<sup>5,6</sup> Our team focused on orthogeriatric treatment and examined all barriers to optimal care for these patients, with a specific eye toward increasing postoperative mobility, controlling postoperative pain, and increasing educational efforts around osteoporosis.<sup>7</sup>

Our multidisciplinary fragility fracture team was established in January 2015. This team, led by the AIMS physicians, streamlined the hospital course for patients with isolated hip fractures, beginning with their admission from the emergency department (ED). The fragility fracture program clearly delineates responsibilities among providers and depicts a clear work flow from admission to post-hospital transition. Using an electronic medical record (EMR) order set unique for fragility hip fractures, these patients were quickly and efficiently admitted to the hospital after diagnosis, decreasing their wait time in the ED. During this admission process, the admitting physician executed a cardiac risk assessment. This focused additional evaluation minimized unnecessary cardiology consults. Following this stratification, if patients were found to require specialized cardiology input and workup prior to operative intervention, further studies were ordered at the same time as the cardiology consult, namely electrocardiograms and echocardiograms. The ability for a cardiologist to review a patient's objective information at their initial consult expedited the preoperative risk assessment as they had all of the objective data present at the time of the cardiologist's initial visit.

In addition to ordering supplementary tests, the patient's coagulation status was assessed by both the ED physician and the admitting AIMS physician. If indicated, the patient's anticoagulation was reversed according to protocol, initiated by the ED care providers, thus expediting the transition to the operating room. Following resolution of these potential barriers, patients were admitted to a specific hospital ward, with a designated nursing staff, familiar with the fragility fracture program and their role in the protocol. Preoperative evaluation was executed by an anesthesiologist and all efforts were made to have femoral nerve blocks placed on all eligible patients. Starting in the post-anesthesia care unit (PACU), patients were given multi-modal anesthesia to maximize pain control while avoiding large doses of opiates.

These procedures had the cumulative effect of patients not only entering the hospital faster but also being preoperatively evaluated more thoroughly. Nutritionists were part of this whole-body assessment. A patient's nutrition was assessed by the admitting physician at the time of their initial encounter and nutrition consults were included in the admission order set for patients requiring a consult or further evaluation. The same is true of physical therapy and occupational therapy (PTOT). Given that patients were being operatively managed for their isolated hip fragility fracture, physical therapy was consulted on arrival to assess their risk of future falls and to work on rehabilitation and strength training postoperatively. The physical therapists were aware of those patients with fragility hip fractures prior to their operative intervention, which allowed the physical therapists to see these patients in an expedited manner postoperatively. Goals included weight-bearing on postoperative day one and mobilizing with the nursing staff as well as the PTOT team. In addition, if laboratory results showed evidence of osteoporosis, osteoporosis

education was instituted by the clinical coordinator postoperatively and follow up was arranged with the patient's primary care physician. These practices were instituted based upon the AAOS and IGFS guidelines for physical therapy, nutrition, and interdisciplinary care.<sup>5,6</sup>

## 2. Methods

Our hospital is an academic medical center, verified by the American College of Surgeons (ACS) as a level II trauma center. Our institution participates in the American College of Surgeons' Trauma Quality Improvement Program (TQIP). Our TQIP database is a prospectively collected registry of all trauma patients. We queried our TQIP database for patients admitted to our facility with an isolated hip fracture from a low velocity mechanism between January 1, 2014 and December 31, 2015.

We stratified patients into two groups: those from 2014 who presented before implementation of our fragility fracture program and those who were injured and admitted after the fragility fracture program was in place in 2015. We compared demographic information, comorbidities, complications and outcomes measures. Demographics included age, gender, race/ethnic background, mechanism of injury (MOI) and Injury Severity Score (ISS). Comorbidities were compared with Fisher's exact test. Complications were calculated as a proportion of the annual sample; outcome measures included mortality, hospital length of stay (HLOS), ICU length of stay (ICULOS), discharge destination, and time to operative intervention. Categorical data were compared using Fisher's exact test with 95% confidence intervals (95% CI). Continuous data were compared using student's *t*-test with standard deviations (SD). Injury Severity Score, HLOS and ICU LOS were compared using Mann Whitney *U* test  $\pm$ SD.

## 3. Results

Four hundred thirty-seven patients with fragility hip fractures were studied from 2014 to 2015. The two groups were not significantly different with respect to age, gender, or race. Mechanism of injury was also not statistically significant between the two groups. Co-morbidities were similar in the patient populations except for an increase in patients with CHF in 2015 ( $p=0.02$ ) (Table 1). The average age was similar at 81.1 years old in 2014 and 82.7 years old in 2015 ( $p=0.99$ ). The national average for patients with isolated hip fractures in 2016 is 82 years old (Table 2).<sup>8</sup>

The median length of stay was four days for both groups (2014 and 2015), two days less than the national average of six days (Table 2). Median length of stay, in-hospital mortality, UTI, and pressure ulcers were all lower in our institution as compared to the national TQIP average. Complication rates were low, and the differences were statistically insignificant. Our rates of UTI and pressure ulcers were below the national average for 2014 and 2015. DVT rates fell below the national average in 2015, after institution of our fragility fracture program, with only one case in 2015. Pneumonias were the only tracked complication noted to increase in 2015 to 2.5%, above the national average of 1.2% and larger than the previous year (1%).

Most notably, our discharges to home and acute inpatient rehabilitation ("desirable discharges") increased significantly compared to discharges to skilled nursing facilities (SNFs), hospice, and death in 2015 as compared to 2014 ( $p=0.007$ ).

## 4. Discussion

Several models of a geriatric fracture program have been developed in recent years with variable degrees of integration, but

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