Old-age specialists may boost recovery among injured seniors

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Consultation with geriatrician in hospital linked with greater return to independence in study.

(HealthDay)—Seniors who suffer an injury are more likely to regain their independence if they consult a geriatric specialist during their hospital stay, researchers report.

The study included people 65 and older with injuries ranging from a minor rib fracture from a fall to multiple fractures or head trauma suffered as a driver, passenger or pedestrian in a traffic accident.

A year after discharge from the hospital, the patients were asked how well they were able to perform daily activities such as walking, bathing, managing finances, light housework and shopping.

Those who had a consultation with a geriatrician during their hospital stay were able to return to about two-thirds more daily activities than those who did not, according to the study published recently in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Surgery*.

"Trauma surgeons have long struggled with the fragility of their older trauma patients who have much greater health risks for the same injuries experienced by younger patients," senior study author Dr. Lillian Min, an assistant professor in the division of geriatric medicine at the University of Michigan Medical School, said in a university news release.

"We've come a long way in improving our survival rates of these patients, but what we didn't know was whether we were returning them to their homes and communities sicker than they were before," she said. "What we found was that geriatric interventions helped older patients take better care of themselves and be more independent."

Geriatricians specialize in the care of older people. It's estimated that people aged 65 and older will account for 40 percent of all U.S. trauma patients in over the next four decades.

"This information compels us to do more to help our older patients get back to normal life," Min said. "Our findings suggest that even small changes in care can lead to decreased complications and improve health outcomes for a vulnerable group. We have a responsibility to do what we can to strengthen collaborations between surgery and geriatric medicine doctors."

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Aging has more about older adults and falls.

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