Screenings Can Help Identify At-risk Older Adults

**The Challenge:** Emergency Medical Service (EMS) teams frequently are the first point of contact for older adults experiencing health problems. Because these teams often enter the homes of people in distress, they have the opportunity to identify and prevent underlying issues that may lead to more serious medical conditions.

**Project Goals:** This pilot project in Shawano County will position EMS personnel to become the eyes and ears for physicians and social service agencies. EMS providers will be trained to screen older adults for key risk factors when responding to 911 non-life-threatening calls. The screenings will determine whether patients are at risk for falls, medication errors and/or depression. If patients are deemed at risk, EMS personnel will refer them to an appropriate health care or social service agency for further evaluation and treatment.

**Results:** EMS personnel and paramedics screened 1,556 people 60 and older, and they referred 369 patients at risk of falls, medication errors or depression to further services. Before this pilot project, they had not referred any patients for services related to these issues.

Many patients indicated that they knew they needed help but didn’t know how to find it or didn’t realize they qualified for programs that could help them. Shawano Ambulance Service has made screening and referrals of older adults a part of its ongoing practice and is continuing to provide staff members with geriatrics education.

**Publication:** Marquardt, L. “Ambulance service learning more about senior patients.” The Shawano Leader. (2013)