

Valley Voice: Mizell working to prevent senior falls

Ginny Foat, Special to The Desert Sun 11:28 a.m. PST November 11, 2015



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Imagine there is a serious and sometimes life-threatening epidemic raging through the Coachella Valley that has affected thousands of seniors. In fact, there is such an epidemic. According to a recent study by the Health Assessment and Research for Communities, (HARC), approximately 23,575 local seniors fell once or more in a three-month period and 9,245 of those falls resulted in serious injury.

This year, on the National Council on Aging's "Fall Prevention Awareness Day," Mizell Senior Center announced plans to begin an award-winning evidence-based fall prevention program, "A Matter of Balance." Mizell fall prevention staff will be training volunteers and personnel in other senior centers, skilled nursing facilities, and hospitals across the Coachella Valley on how to offer the program at their facility.

With primary funding from The Desert Healthcare District and strong support from the Auen Foundation, this is the only evidence-based senior fall prevention program being offered in our valley.

Some may be surprised to learn that injuries from falls are a leading cause of death among seniors. Each year one of three older adults experiences a fall, which often causes severe disability. Injuries can lead to fear of falling, sedentary behavior and impaired function. When older adults fear falling, they tend to limit their activities as a result. This limitation of activity can lead to isolation, depression and a decreased quality of life. In California, 25 percent of older adults who fall and break a hip die within a year, and falls among older adults are the most common cause of trauma injuries and hospital admissions nationwide. Mizell hopes these efforts significantly prevent and reduce falls and the fear of falling among our large population of older adults.

The nationally recognized "A Matter of Balance" program was developed at the Roybal Center at Boston University, and consists of eight two-hour sessions, a home safety visit, review of medications by a pharmacist and other issues that may be contributing factors to falling. For the past year Mizell has run a pilot program where we gathered statistics and feedback from participants. The series has proven to be very effective, with participants showing significant improvements in fall management, fall control, exercise, and social limitations with regard to concerns about falling. Over 90 percent of program graduates continue with a regular exercise regimen when before they never exercised regularly. Dr. Marc Eisman, D.C. and Dr. Stephen Matthews, D.C. have been certified as Master Trainers and will be teaching at participating facilities.

"Get Balanced," the second fall prevention class offered at Mizell, was created as an extension of the original "A Matter of Balance" program to meet the demand for a regular exercise class focused on balance. Utilizing evidence-based components, the course is a continuing education program for graduates of the "Get Balanced" class, offering practical strategies to help seniors manage falls and increase activity levels.

"A Matter of Balance" classes are currently scheduled for January at Mizell Senior Center, Desert Regional Medical Center, Eisenhower Medical Center, Joslyn Center, and Desert Cove Assisted Living in Desert Hot Springs, with new class locations being developed.

For information about a class near you, contact Suzanne Spencer, Fall Prevention Program director at (760) 323-5689 Ext. 110.

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