Office-Based Questionnaires Flag Fall Risk in MS Patients

**Major Finding:** The number of falls in MS patients seen at an outpatient neurology clinic was strongly correlated with higher scores on the Expanded Disability Status Scale (r = 0.64) and lower scores on the Activities-Specific Balance Confidence scale (r = 0.77).

**Data Source:** A study of 50 consecutive MS outpatients aged 16-68 years.

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**BY HEIDI SPLETE**

**TORONTO—** Poor scores on questionnaires related to balance confidence and disease severity were significant predictors of falls in adults with multiple sclerosis, based on data from a study of outpatients at a single facility.

Previous European studies have suggested an association between multiple sclerosis (MS) disease severity and the frequency of falling, but data on similar associations in U.S. patients are limited, said Dr. Michelle Cameron, a postdoctoral fellow at Oregon Health & Science University, Portland.

Dr. Cameron used two questionnaires to assess fall frequency in 50 consecutive MS patients during a clinical visit. Patients completed the Activities-Specific Balance Confidence (ABC) Scale and the self-reported Expanded Disability Status Scale (EDSS). The patients’ EDSS scores ranged from 1 to 5, with an average score of 3.

The patients ranged in age from 16-68 years, with a mean age of 46 years, and 74% were women. A total of 31 patients (62%) reported falling at least once in the year prior to the study, and 14 (28%) reported falling at least six times in the year prior to the study. In addition, three of the patients (6%) reported falling at least six times during the 2 months prior to the study.

The number of falls was strongly correlated with higher scores on the EDSS (r = 0.64) and lower scores on the ABC scale (r = 0.77). The number of falls over a 12-month period was strongly correlated with lower ABC scale scores (r = 0.74).

The results suggest that a majority of MS patients fall and more than one-fourth of them fall frequently, said Dr. Cameron, who presented her study in a poster at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Neurology. “Falls occur more often in those with lower balance confidence,” she said.

The ABC scale is a simple questionnaire about falls that can easily be administered in a clinical setting. Dr. Cameron noted, and clinicians who identify patients at risk for falls can work with them to improve balance confidence.