

Research on ageing: From research to practice to policy

Falls are very common as people get older and many result in hospitalisations. Research led by Professor Rose Anne Kenny, Professor of Medical Gerontology and Director of the Mercer's Institute for Successful Ageing, showed that falls can be caused by underlying heart irregularities and exaggerated swings in brain blood flow. These abnormal blood pressure and heart rate patterns predict the adults at highest risk of future fractures as well as depression, cognitive impairment and mortality. This research, supported by subsequent policy changes, has significantly reduced the number of older people who are hospitalised after a fall.

The TILDA study showed that 25% of people aged 50-55 and 45% of people over 80 experience falls each year. Fifteen per cent require hospital care for injuries such as fractures and head injuries.

Using this information, fallers were assessed

in the emergency department (ED) using small implanted monitoring technologies which confirmed that heart irregularities were linked to falls. Resultant novel ED care

“The research reflects 15 years of work by multidisciplinary teams and illustrates how basic research and population studies can rapidly translate into clinical practice.”

Professor Rose Anne Kenny

Professor of Medical Gerontology and Director of the Mercer's Institute for Successful Ageing

pathways demonstrated a 50% reduction in hospital admissions and are being replicated globally. An annual syncope and falls clinical training program in Mercer's Institute for Successful Ageing at St James's Hospital, and a new module in Trinity College's Ageing

and Biogerontology Masters disseminates the research. The findings informed new recommendations in three recent international guidelines and an EU consensus paper.

The research is funded by national and international bodies, including the Health Research Board, Department of Health, Science Foundation Ireland, H2020, EIT, NIH/NIA and philanthropy.

