

Reflections on NURSING

research begets solutions

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On the rehabilitation unit for post-hip-fracture patients where I work, I often educate people about why taking calcium and vitamin D supplements is so important to reduce the risk of a future fracture. But after four years on the unit, I worry about what patients tell me. Many say they are unlikely to continue the osteoporosis treatment regime because the supplements are expensive, and the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program doesn't cover them.

I was interested in learning more about this issue, so I reviewed relevant literature. Not surprisingly, I discovered supplements decrease the risk of fractures by 25 per cent, and cost considerably less than surgery, including the hospital stay and the potential complications. The total price to treat a hip fracture is approximately \$21,385. But \$1,200 is all it would take to cover the cost of vitamin D and calcium for one person for 20 years.

These numbers inspired me to advocate for my patients and others who would benefit from supplements. I wrote to my local MPP with the cost/benefit analysis I found. I told him ensuring these nutrients are covered by the ODB program is an opportunity for the government to make a substantial difference not only for people's health, but for health-care spending. To my surprise, my MPP sent the information to Minister of Health David Caplan. I felt empowered and surprised when I received an e-mail from Caplan's office to tell me he would look into the topic. There haven't been any changes yet, but the response showed me the power nurses have to advocate for better health for all our patients.

