

# High Rates of Imminent Subsequent Fracture After Femoral Neck Fracture in the Elderly

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**Background:** Fragility fractures of the hip are known to be followed frequently by subsequent fragility fractures, including second hip fractures. Data on subsequent fractures are available for aggregated index femoral neck and intertrochanteric femoral fractures, grouped generically as hip fractures, but not specifically for femoral neck fractures. There is increasing recognition that a subsequent fracture often occurs early after a hip fracture in the elderly, creating an emphasis on the concept of “imminent fracture risk.” Since 2000, there have been many reports on the care gap in interventions after a fragility fracture, with concern regarding the slow uptake of appropriate systemic treatments designed to prevent a subsequent fracture in high-risk patients.

**Methods:** As planned a priori, we performed an analysis of subsequent fractures after an index femoral neck fracture in 2 prospective clinical trials involving 2,520 patients from 90 sites on 5 continents. We recorded the incidence and time of occurrence of all secondary fragility fractures as well as the reported use of bone-protective medication in all subjects.

**Results:** In the 24 months following the index femoral neck fracture, 226 (9.0%) of 2,520 patients sustained at least 1 subsequent fragility fracture, including 113 hip fractures (4.5%). The median interval from the index fracture to a subsequent fracture was approximately 9.0 months. Only 25.2% (634) of the 2,520 patients reported using bone-protective medications at any time during follow-up. Female patients, those with nondisplaced index fractures, and those treated with arthroplasty, were more likely to have received protective medication.

**Conclusions:** Subsequent fractures, including second hip fractures, occurred frequently and early following an index femoral neck fracture in 2 large global cohorts. Interventions to prevent a subsequent fracture were instituted in only 1 of 4 patients, even though a focused directive was included in both study protocols.

**Level of Evidence:** Prognostic Level II. See Instructions for Authors for a complete description of levels of evidence.

Approximately 9 million low-energy fractures occur each year worldwide, including 1.6 million proximal femoral fractures<sup>1</sup>. A recent fragility fracture is an important predictive factor for subsequent fracture<sup>2</sup>. A hip fracture occurring with minimal trauma is reported as the clinical risk factor that confers the highest risk of future fracture<sup>3</sup> and is included in multiple international guidelines as an indication for the administration of bone-protective medication<sup>4-8</sup>. Several medications are available internationally and have proven efficacy in preventing major fragility fractures<sup>9</sup>.

Recent reports have emphasized the risk of a subsequent fracture occurring relatively soon (within 1 year) after a fragility fracture (an imminent fracture risk), highlighting the impor-

tance of initiating preventive measures early after hip and other fragility fractures<sup>10,11</sup>. Several medical societies have advocated for the establishment of systematic jurisdiction-wide fracture prevention programs, including the American Orthopaedic Association’s “Own the Bone” initiative<sup>12</sup> and the Fracture Clinic Screening Program in Ontario, Canada<sup>13,14</sup>. Multiple studies have demonstrated that bone-protective medications can improve bone architecture and density, and they confer a degree of fracture protection within 6 months after initiation<sup>15-17</sup>.

Patients with hip fractures are routinely treated as a single risk group. To our knowledge, no published studies have documented subsequent fracture risk levels specific to different proximal femoral fracture sites (femoral neck versus intertrochanteric).

\*A list of the FAITH Investigators and a list of the HEALTH Investigators are included in a note at the end of the article.

**Disclosure:** The **Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest** forms are provided with the online version of the article (<http://links.lww.com/JBJS/H218>).

A **data-sharing statement** is provided with the online version of the article (<http://links.lww.com/JBJS/H219>).

We investigated the incidence and time of occurrence of subsequent fractures within 24 months of an index fracture of the femoral neck (and not other proximal femoral sites) in patients enrolled in 2 large international prospective trials, the FAITH (Fixation using Alternative Implants for the Treatment of Hip fractures) and HEALTH (Hip fracture Evaluation with ALternatives of Total hip arthroplasty versus Hemiarthroplasty) trials<sup>18,19</sup>. Disaggregating data on subsequent fracture risk for an index femoral neck fracture, as distinct from other anatomic sites of hip fracture, could result in an increased understanding of fracture risk in clinical practice, improved randomization protocols for pharmacotherapy trials, and optimized designs of secondary fracture prevention programs and the evaluation of their cost-effectiveness. We also sought to determine the status of current global fracture prevention practices for this high-risk group, after 20 years of widespread education and promotion by clinicians and societies regarding the need for interventions to prevent a subsequent fracture in high-risk patients with a fragility fracture<sup>20</sup>.

## Materials and Methods

### FAITH Study Overview

The FAITH trial<sup>18,21</sup> (ClinicalTrials.gov NCT00761813) enrolled 1,079 patients who were at least 50 years old with a low-energy femoral neck fracture treated by fracture fixation with a sliding hip screw or cancellous screws and were from 81 clinical sites in 8 countries. Approximately one-third (350) of these fractures were displaced. The primary outcome was unplanned revision surgery to promote healing, relieve pain, treat infection, or improve function within 24 months of fracture fixation.

### HEALTH Study Overview

The HEALTH trial<sup>19,22</sup> (ClinicalTrials.gov NCT00556842) compared total hip arthroplasty and hemiarthroplasty in 1,441 patients who were at least 50 years old with a displaced femoral neck fracture and were from 80 clinical sites in 10 countries. The primary outcome was unplanned revision surgery within 24 months of the femoral neck fracture.

### Bone Health

Oral administration of calcium (600 mg per day) and vitamin D (1,000 IU per day) to all participants was required in the trial protocols. The study steering committee intended to include bone-protective medications in the protocol to reduce subsequent fracture risk. However, because of differences in national guidelines, practice patterns, and resources across sites worldwide, we were unable to make administration of bone-protective medications obligatory. The study protocols, therefore, included a requirement for study sites to manage fracture risk and osteoporosis according to practices of local bone health experts. The protocols further required fracture prevention to be addressed at each site by documenting the patient's medication use at each follow-up visit through self-reporting. The goal was to track the frequency with which bone health interventions were performed to lower subsequent fracture risk.

### Analysis Plan

This secondary analysis, which had been planned a priori, addressed the following questions: (1) How many patients experienced a subsequent fracture at any skeletal site within 24 months following their index hip fracture, and after what time interval? (2) How many patients were taking bone-protective medication (bisphosphonates, calcitonin, teriparatide [Forteo], denosumab [Prolia], or zoledronic acid [Aclasta]) at the time of follow-up after the index femoral neck fracture? (3) What prognostic factors were associated with the use of bone-protective osteoporosis medications (not including vitamin D and calcium) during follow-up after the index femoral neck fracture?

### Data Analysis

We used descriptive statistics to report the characteristics of patients with secondary fractures and osteoporosis medication use. We performed a logistic regression analysis, adjusted for 30-day mortality, to compare secondary fracture rates among participants from the trials and a multivariable logistic regression analysis to investigate the association between prognostic variables and osteoporosis medication use following the index femoral neck fracture. The dependent variable was osteoporosis medication use, and we included 7 independent variables, selected on the basis of the previous literature<sup>23</sup> and expert opinions, which were age, sex, type of surgical method, fracture displacement, American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) physical status, prefracture living setting, and prefracture functional status. The results are reported as odds ratios (ORs), with corresponding 95% confidence intervals (CIs), and p values. Analyses were conducted using R software (version 4.0.2; R Foundation for Statistical Computing).

### Source of Funding

The HEALTH trial was supported by research grants from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), National Institutes of Health (NIH), ZorgOnderzoek Nederland-medische wetenschappen, Sophies Minde Foundation for Orthopaedic Research, McMaster Surgical Associates, and Stryker Orthopaedics. The FAITH trial was supported by research grants from CIHR, NIH, Stichting Nuts Ohra, the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development, and Physicians' Services Incorporated. Dr. Bhandari was funded, in part, through the Early Research Award Program (McMaster University, Canada).

The FAITH trial was supported by the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases of the NIH and by The County Durham & Tees Valley Comprehensive Local Research Network.

## Results

### Participant Characteristics

The combined cohort included 1,791 patients with a displaced femoral neck fracture, with 1,441 from the HEALTH trial and 350 from the FAITH trial. A detailed comparison of these cohorts has been described<sup>24</sup>. There were a total of 729 non-displaced femoral neck fractures, which were all from the FAITH trial. Fracture displacement could not be confirmed for 8 FAITH participants because of poor radiographic image quality. There was

no significant difference in 30-day mortality between the HEALTH (n = 35; 2.4%) and FAITH trials (n = 18; 1.7%; p = 0.19).

### *Incidence of Subsequent Fractures Following a Hip Fracture and the Interval to Subsequent Fracture*

In the 24 months following a femoral neck fracture, 226 (9.0%) of the 2,520 patients enrolled in the 2 trials sustained a subsequent fracture, resulting in a total of 282 fractures (Table I). Females accounted for 77.0% (174) of the 226 patients who had a subsequent fracture and 65.7% (1,657) of all 2,520 patients. The average age of those with a subsequent fracture was 76.9 years in the FAITH cohort and 79.5 years in the HEALTH cohort (Table II). The median interval from index fracture to secondary fracture occurrence was 9.0 months for FAITH trial patients and 9.6 months for HEALTH trial patients.

A significantly higher proportion of patients sustained subsequent fractures in the HEALTH (arthroplasty) cohort (164 [11.4%] of 1,441) than in the FAITH (internal fixation) cohort (62 [5.7%] of 1,079) (p < 0.001) (Table I). However, the patients in the HEALTH trial were considered to be at higher risk for subsequent fracture because they were significantly more likely to be female; have an ASA classification of III, IV, or V; and have a diagnosis of osteoporosis compared with the patients in the FAITH cohort with displaced femoral neck fractures (p < 0.001) (Table II)<sup>24</sup>. Adjusting our logistic regression analysis for 2-year mortality when comparing secondary fracture rates among participants from the trials did not alter the results of the original analysis, which adjusted for 30-day mortality.

There were 282 secondary fractures reported in 226 patients. The most common location for a subsequent fracture was the contralateral hip (113 fractures; 40.1%), followed by the proximal humerus (33 fractures; 11.7%), a vertebra (29 fractures; 10.3%), the pelvis (25 fractures; 8.9%), and a rib (20 fractures; 7.1%). The incidence of secondary fractures over the 24-month follow-up period is displayed in Figure 1.

### *Osteoporosis Medication Use*

Bone-protective or osteoporosis medication use following the index hip fracture was recorded, per the protocol, during all follow-up visits for all patients (Table III). Participants indicated whether they used 1 type or a combination of different medications. The proportion of participants using bone-protective medications was low and relatively constant throughout the follow-up period. Overall, only 25.2% (634) of the 2,520 patients

in both cohorts reported taking bone-protective medications at any time between the index fracture and final follow-up at 2 years.

Females (OR, 1.75 [95% CI, 1.41 to 2.17]; p < 0.001), those with nondisplaced fractures (OR, 1.81 [95% CI, 1.23 to 2.78]; p = 0.003), and those treated with arthroplasty (OR, 3.48 [95% CI, 2.39 to 5.20]; p < 0.001) had significantly higher odds of medication administration (Table IV).

### **Discussion**

Using data from the FAITH and HEALTH trials, we investigated the incidence and pattern of secondary fractures during the first 24 months after a low-energy femoral neck fracture in patients over the age of 50 years who were managed with internal fixation or arthroplasty.

The incidence of a secondary fracture (following the index hip fracture) in our combined cohorts at 2 years was 9.0% (226) of 2,520 patients, including a second hip fracture in 4.5% (113) of all 2,520 patients. In a jurisdiction-wide study following patients who sustained hip fractures in the province of Ontario, Canada, 3.0% of patients sustained a subsequent fracture within 1 year, 6.7% within 2 years, and 13.3% within 5 years, providing an indication of the burden of expected secondary fractures<sup>10,25,26</sup>.

HEALTH trial patients who underwent joint replacement procedures after a femoral neck fracture had a significantly higher rate of all subsequent secondary fragility fractures (11.4% [164 of 1,441]) than patients in the FAITH trial who were treated with internal fixation of the fracture (5.7% [62 of 1,079]; p < 0.001). The significance of this finding is unclear because of probable selection bias in the treatment of patients. Surgeons may have had individual or regional preferences or bias for selection of internal fixation versus prosthetic arthroplasty, and for subtypes of both internal fixation and prosthetic arthroplasty, depending on patient age, bone quality, fracture displacement, local resources, and personal operative experience. Therefore, we cannot conclude that the difference in subsequent fracture rates between treatment groups in the 2 trials has predictive value.

It is widely assumed that “hip fractures,” i.e., fractures of the proximal part of the femur, are a single group with respect to future (secondary) major fragility fracture risk, including a future (second) hip fracture. For example, the inclusion criteria for the HORIZON (Health Outcomes and Reduced Incidence with Zoledronic Acid Once Yearly) prospective randomized clinical trial of zoledronic acid (Aclasta) versus placebo included all patients with a recent hip fracture, without reference to fracture location in the femoral neck or intertrochanteric

**TABLE I Secondary Fracture Rates After Index Femoral Neck Fracture in FAITH and HEALTH Studies**

	FAITH Patients (N = 1,079)	HEALTH Patients (N = 1,441)	Total (N = 2,520)	P Value*
No. (%) of secondary fractures	88 (8.2)	194 (13.5)	282 (11.2)	<0.001
No. (%) of patients with a secondary fracture	62 (5.7)	164 (11.4)	226 (9.0)	<0.001

\*Regression adjusted for 30-day mortality.

**TABLE II Characteristics of Patients Who Experienced  
Secondary Fractures in FAITH and HEALTH Studies**

Variable	FAITH Patients (N = 62) with Secondary Fractures (N = 88)	HEALTH Patients (N = 164) with Secondary Fractures (N = 194)
Secondary fractures (no. [%] of patients)		
1	43 (69.4)	137 (83.5)
2	13 (20.9)	24 (14.6)
3	5 (8.1)	3 (1.8)
4	1 (1.6)	0 (0.0)
Location of fracture (no. [%] of fractures)		
Hip	24 (27.3)	89 (45.9)
Pelvis	12 (13.6)	13 (6.7)
Vertebra	9 (10.2)	20 (10.3)
Humerus	9 (10.2)	24 (12.4)
Rib	9 (10.2)	11 (5.7)
Femur	7 (8.0)	4 (2.1)
Ankle	5 (5.7)	0 (0.0)
Tibia	4 (4.5)	7 (3.6)
Radius	3 (3.4)	11 (5.7)
Wrist	2 (2.3)	4 (2.1)
Sacrum	2 (2.3)	0 (0.0)
Ulna	1 (1.1)	1 (0.5)
Fibula	1 (1.1)	1 (0.5)
Patella	0 (0.0)	5 (2.6)
Clavicle	0 (0.0)	4 (2.1)
Taking osteoporosis medication at time of secondary fracture (no. [%] of patients)		
Yes	6 (9.7)	37 (22.6)
No	56 (90.3)	127 (77.4)
Time to fracture occurrence* (mo)	9.0 (11.3)	9.6 (14.1)
Mean age (stand. dev.) (yr)	76.9 (10.7)	79.5 (8.1)
Sex (no. [% of patients])		
Male	16 (25.8)	36 (22.0)
Female	46 (74.2)	128 (78.0)
Ethnicity (no. [%] of patients)		
South Asian	2 (3.2)	1 (0.6)
East Asian	0 (0.0)	1 (0.6)
Black	3 (4.8)	2 (1.2)
Hispanic or Latino	1 (1.6)	2 (1.2)
White	56 (90.3)	158 (96.3)
Country (no. [%] of patients)		
Canada	18 (29.0)	39 (23.8)
U.S.	35 (56.5)	22 (13.4)

*continued***TABLE II (continued)**

Variable	FAITH Patients (N = 62) with Secondary Fractures (N = 88)	HEALTH Patients (N = 164) with Secondary Fractures (N = 194)
Finland	0 (0.0)	7 (4.3)
Netherlands	0 (0.0)	20 (12.2)
Norway	3 (4.8)	26 (15.9)
Spain	0 (0.0)	28 (17.1)
U.K.	0 (0.0)	11 (6.7)
Australia	3 (4.8)	9 (5.5)
New Zealand	0 (0.0)	2 (1.2)
India	3 (4.8)	0 (0.0)
Continent (no. [%] of patients)		
Europe	3 (4.8)	92 (56.1)
North America	53 (85.5)	61 (37.2)
Oceania	3 (4.8)	11 (6.7)
Asia	3 (4.8)	0 (0.0)
Comorbidities (no. [%] of patients)		
Heart disease	25 (40.3)	67 (40.9)
High blood pressure	42 (67.7)	95 (57.9)
Lung disease	14 (22.6)	31 (18.9)
Diabetes	16 (25.8)	30 (18.3)
Ulcers or stomach disease	17 (27.4)	12 (7.3)
Kidney disease	6 (9.7)	15 (9.1)
Anemia or other blood disease	10 (16.1)	11 (6.7)
Depression	15 (24.2)	23 (14.0)
Cancer	9 (14.5)	17 (10.4)
Osteoarthritis or degenerative arthritis	20 (32.3)	26 (15.9)
Back pain	20 (32.3)	18 (11.0)
Rheumatoid arthritis	3 (4.8)	5 (3.0)

\*The values are given as the median, with the width of the interquartile range in parentheses.

region<sup>27</sup>. Secondary fractures and subsequent fracture risk were reported without reference to the anatomical location of the index hip fracture. Large jurisdiction-wide fracture liaison services, such as the Ontario, Canada, system, have reported a subsequent fracture after an index hip fracture without reference to the specific site of the index fracture, and therefore without defining any potential differential in subsequent fracture risk for the 2 major anatomic sites of hip fracture<sup>10,28</sup>. The data we present provide information on subsequent fracture rates (at all sites) solely after an index femoral neck fracture in 2 patient cohorts. If similar data become available for a subsequent fracture after an intertrochanteric fracture of the femur (the other

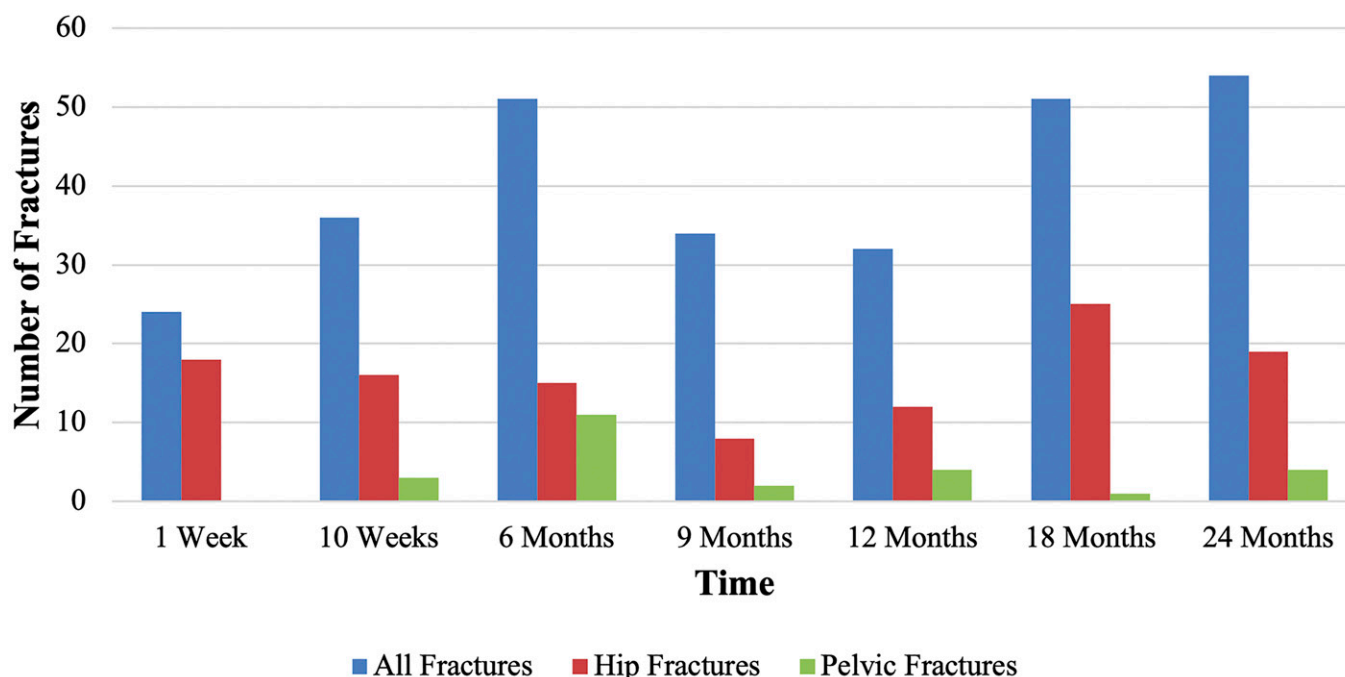


Fig. 1  
Distribution of secondary fractures over 24 months in the FAITH and HEALTH trials.

frequent site of hip fracture), a differential in subsequent fracture risk may become apparent. It would then be possible to determine whether aggregation of all hip fractures into a single risk group is valid, or conversely whether disaggregation has value. We speculate that this could improve randomization in drug trials and performance audits of fracture prevention programs.

The standardized protocol in the HEALTH and FAITH trials for postoperative care for all enrolled patients included the initiation of treatment with 600 mg of calcium by mouth daily and 1,000 IU of vitamin D per day (in the absence of contraindications). Because of widely varying practices and resources in the numerous sites in 12 countries, we were unable to mandate prescription of bone-protective medications after the index hip fracture as a condition of participation. The protocol, therefore, required further investigation and treatment of osteoporosis (or intervention for fracture risk reduction) by local experts to be carried out at the study sites<sup>21</sup>, since all included patients were considered at high risk for future fracture according to current guidelines<sup>4</sup>. Despite the fact that the study protocols directed the attention of participating surgeons and other study personnel to the importance of fracture prevention, only 25.2% of patients reported taking bone-protective medications at any time during the study. Unfortunately, we are unable to distinguish patients who did not fill prescriptions from those for whom no prescription was ordered. This distinction is important to the procedures of fracture liaison services in correcting undertreatment of patients at high risk for future major osteoporotic fractures. High-functioning fracture liaison services have reported medication prescription rates for older patients with a fragility fracture to be in the range of 66.2% to 90.5%<sup>29-31</sup>.

The significantly higher number of females than males who have reported taking bone-protective medication is consistent with the widespread perception associating osteoporosis with female sex, although men who sustain hip fractures have equally high subsequent fracture rates and greater mortality risk<sup>2</sup>. The higher rates of treatment in patients who had non-displaced rather than displaced fractures and in patients treated with arthroplasty rather than internal fixation may reflect surgeon perceptions and bias and are otherwise unexplained. Resource availability for surgical procedures and osteoporosis treatment may affect treatment rates. Medication costs may represent a barrier to prescriptions for reduction of fracture risk, although low-cost generic bisphosphonates are available in numerous countries.

As the 90 sites on 5 continents participated at least in part on the basis of the interest of a leading local surgeon investigator,

TABLE III Use of Osteoporosis Medications During at Least 1 Follow-up Visit in FAITH and HEALTH Studies

	FAITH (N = 1,079) (no. [%])	HEALTH (N = 1,441) (no. [%])
Osteoporosis medication		
Yes	177 (16.4)	457 (31.7)
Type of medication		
Bisphosphonates	149 (13.8)	322 (22.3)
Calcitonin	18 (1.7)	10 (0.7)
Other osteoporosis medications	15 (1.4)	148 (10.3)



**TABLE IV Prognostic Variables Associated with Osteoporosis Medication Use (N = 2,457\*; 634 Events with Use)**

Variable†	Odds Ratio (95% CI)	P Value
Surgical method		
Arthroplasty versus internal fixation	3.48 (2.39, 5.20)	<0.001
Fracture displacement		
Nondisplaced versus displaced	1.81 (1.23, 2.78)	0.003
Sex		
Female versus male	1.75 (1.41, 2.17)	<0.001
Age (per 10-year increase)	0.96 (0.87, 1.06)	0.40
ASA physical status		
Class III, IV, and V versus class I and II	1.19 (0.97, 1.44)	0.09
Prefracture living setting		
Institutionalized versus not institutionalized	0.71 (0.42, 1.13)	0.20
Prefracture functional status		
Use of aid versus independent ambulator	1.02 (0.81, 1.29)	0.80

\*Participants with complete data for this analysis. †The reference group is the second group listed. ASA = American Society of Anesthesiologists.

we considered that the sites were not necessarily fully representative of their country or continent. This selection bias discouraged us from comparing the data across regions. However, this did not, in our opinion, weaken our principal findings about the frequency of subsequent fractures and the low rate of secondary prevention through the use of bone-protective medications, which were consistent across all study sites.

The low rate of preventive intervention in these studies is consistent with the widely documented so-called care gap in clinical practice<sup>32</sup>, i.e., the gap between evidence-based guideline recommendations for provision of preventive care and the widespread lack of treatment after hip fracture<sup>33</sup>. The failure, over the past 20 years, of individual practitioners and health systems to correct the well-documented lack of preventive treatment for high-risk patients who have sustained a hip fracture is a perplexing problem that has resisted correction<sup>34,35</sup>. In recent years, intensive focus has been placed on developing and implementing systematic fracture prevention programs in numerous countries<sup>36-39</sup>. This study demonstrates that the goal of systematically initiating preventive interventions following hip fracture has not been accomplished in most jurisdictions. The findings highlight the need for more effective methods to reverse the global shortfall in fracture liaison services or other effective systematic preventive programs.

The occurrence of a second fragility fracture in 9.0% of subjects, including a second hip fracture in 4.5%, within 24 months after the index femoral neck fracture in these 2 global cohorts supports the concept of an “imminent risk” of a subse-

quent fracture<sup>25,26,40</sup>. The median intervals from index fracture to secondary fracture in the 2 trials were 9.0 and 9.5 months. The short interval to a secondary fracture highlights the urgency of rapidly initiating preventive treatment after a fragility fracture as there is evidence of early improvement of bone architecture and bone density and early diminution of fracture risk within 6 months after initiating bone-protective medication<sup>15-17</sup>. We acknowledge that even prompt administration of medication might not provide protection from subsequent fractures that occur within the first few months following the index fracture.

This secondary analysis is strengthened by including >2,500 patients from 90 sites on 5 continents. The large sample size increases the external validity and generalizability of the outcomes. The frequent follow-up visits over 2 years allowed for a thorough assessment of study participants and detection of secondary fragility fractures, and for close monitoring of bone-protective medication use. We acknowledge that although data on medication use was collected as per the protocol by the study coordinators at each of the 7 follow-up visits, the data are weakened by being self-reported by participants.

This study also exposes the persistence of the infamous care gap—the failure of most centers to initiate a systematic preventive intervention after hip fracture, even when recommended by the protocol within the context of 2 large clinical trials. This highlights the global need to incorporate reliable systems for secondary prevention of future fractures into the management protocols of patients who sustain hip fractures.

In conclusion, subsequent fractures, including second hip fractures, occurred frequently and early following an index femoral neck fracture in 2 large prospectively followed global cohorts. Preventive interventions to reduce a subsequent fracture were instituted in only 1 of 4 patients even though a directive was included in each study protocol. ■

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