

News Release

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Advocates for Nursing Home Residents Applaud Federal Campaign To End the Use of Antipsychotic Drugs as Chemical Restraints

Advocates for nursing home residents who have been working for many years to eliminate all misuse of antipsychotic drugs for nursing home residents applaud the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' new national initiative to address the drugging epidemic. CMS's "National Initiative to Improve Behavioral Health & Reduce the Use of Antipsychotic Medications in Nursing Home Residents" will be announced March 29, 2012. "We thank former CMS Administrator Donald Berwick for his leadership in responding so forcefully to this national disgrace and for setting the wheels in motion to implement this long-overdue initiative," said Janet Wells, Director of Public Policy at The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care.

CMS is developing a national action plan that includes raising public awareness of misuse of antipsychotic drugs, regulatory oversight, technical assistance, and research. The Initiative will be launched with a video streaming event at 1 p.m. EDT, March 29.

<http://surveyortraining.cms.hhs.gov/pubs/VideoInformation.aspx?cid=1098> Several hundred thousand nursing home residents with Alzheimer's Disease or other dementia are given one or more antipsychotic drugs. The HHS Office of Inspector General reported last year that the overwhelming majority of Medicare claims for antipsychotic drug were inappropriate.

"Hundreds of thousands of nursing home residents are inappropriately given antipsychotic drugs each day, despite the Food and Drug Administration's 'Black Box' warnings that these drugs can kill residents who have dementia," said Michael Connors, Long-Term Care Advocate with California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform. "Too many nursing homes use antipsychotic drugs as a way to control residents when they don't have enough well-trained staff who know their residents well and can give them the time and attention they need," he said.

Richard Molloy, Executive Director of the Long Term Care Community Coalition in New York, agreed that "poor staffing levels and inadequately trained staff lead to the gross misuse of drugs as chemical restraints." He continued, "The word needs to get out that chemical restraints are as dangerous for residents as physical restraints."

“Nursing home staff who take the time to understand what residents are communicating with their behavior can provide care to their residents without using chemical restraints,” said Claire Curry, Legal Director, Civil Advocacy Program, Legal Aid Justice Center, Charlottesville, Virginia. “We have seen good care like this in some facilities and know that all facilities can do the same.”

“Federal law, to a large extent, already prohibits the drugging of residents,” said Toby S. Edelman, Senior Policy Attorney, Center for Medicare Advocacy, Washington, DC, “but the law is too timidly enforced. CMS needs to dramatically step up strong enforcement of the law to ensure that all residents get the care and services they need. CMS needs to ensure that no resident receives antipsychotic drugs except in full compliance with the law.”

The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, formerly the National Citizens’ Coalition for Nursing Home Reform, has campaigned for more than 35 years against the use of psychotropic drugs to sedate and restrain residents. The Consumer Voice advocates for higher nurse staffing levels, including registered nurses and certified nursing assistants; staff training about caring for persons with dementia; and enforcement of federal law requiring nursing homes to conduct comprehensive resident assessments and develop care plans that ensure appropriate care rather than behavior control. In 2011, the Consumer Voice’s member organizations passed resolutions asking the Department of Health and Human Services to address the widespread misuse of antipsychotics.

For more information, see the Consumer Voice website,
<http://www.theconsumervoice.org/advocate/antipsychotic-drugs>.

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