



## *End the Misuse of Antipsychotic Medications among Nursing Home Residents*

### What is the Issue?

Residents of long-term care facilities are increasingly being placed on antipsychotic medications despite having no proper diagnosis of psychosis to warrant their use. Twenty-six percent (26%) of all nursing home residents are given antipsychotic medications. Use is even higher (nearly 40%) among residents with dementia - the very individuals that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warns are at serious risk of medical complications and death from taking antipsychotics.

### Why is Ending the Misuse of Antipsychotics Important to Long-Term Care Consumers?

The misuse of antipsychotic medications in nursing homes can harm long-term care consumers in many ways. When used inappropriately among nursing home residents, antipsychotic medications can:

- ***Place Nursing Home Residents at Increased Risk of Injury, Harm and Death:*** Antipsychotic drugs, when prescribed for elderly persons with dementia, can have serious medical complications, including loss of independence, over-sedation, confusion, increased respiratory infections, falls, and strokes. In fact, one study found residents taking antipsychotics had more than triple the likelihood of having a stroke compared to residents not taking these medications. Even worse, antipsychotics can be deadly; in 2005, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued “Black Box” warnings for antipsychotics stating that individuals diagnosed with dementia are at an increased risk of death from their use.
- ***Be Employed as a Chemical Restraint for Nursing Home Residents:*** A chemical restraint is a drug not needed to treat medical symptoms and used because it is more convenient for facility staff or to punish residents. Although the Medicare and Medicaid programs prohibit chemical restraints, antipsychotic medications continue to be used for residents with dementia as a means of behavior control and/or as a substitute for good, individualized care. For this reason, it is important to ensure these medications are being used only when appropriate among residents with proper diagnoses for psychotic disorders.
- ***Destroy the Quality of Life and Dignity of Nursing Home Residents:*** Antipsychotics can be so powerful that they sedate residents to the point where they become listless and unresponsive. Residents may be slumped in wheelchairs or unable to get up from bed; they may no longer be able to participate in activities they enjoy or even talk with their loved ones.

- *Cost All Long-Term Care Consumers Billions of Dollars:* These medications often come with a hefty price tag, so the misuse and overprescribing of antipsychotics in long-term care facilities is extremely costly for the Medicare and Medicaid programs as well as for taxpayers. Ending the misuse of these medications among nursing home residents would help save precious health care dollars that could be used to serve beneficiaries.

### What are the Alternatives?

There are a number of alternative approaches that can be used to care for residents with dementia, such as:

- Identifying and determining the cause of behavioral symptoms (anger, agitation, swearing, continuous wandering, etc.). Labeling people as “problem behaviors” only masks the problem.
- Developing an individualized care plan to address these symptoms.
- Good care practices, such as consistent staff assignments, adequate numbers of staff, staff training in how to care for people without physical or chemical restraints, increased exercise or time outdoors, monitoring and managing acute and chronic pain, and planning individualized activities have been emphasized by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) as nonpharmacological treatments and therapies for residents with dementia and other cognitive disorders.
- Staff training in how to care for people without physical or chemical restraints.

*The Consumer Voice URGES Congress to  
Protect the Rights, Dignity and Well-being of Long-Term Care Consumers  
By Ending the Misuse of Antipsychotics in Nursing Homes*

*For more information on this issue,*

*Please visit <http://www.theconsumervoice.org/advocate/antipsychotic-drugs>*

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