



ISSUES BRIEF: SAFE USAGE OF PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS, PARTICULARLY ANTIPSYCHOTICS, WITH NURSING HOME RESIDENTS AND OLDER ADULTS

- Issue:** Psychotropics (antipsychotics, antidepressants, antianxiety drugs, & hypnotics) have positive outcomes when used as intended but have devastating effects when misused as a chemical restraint with nursing home residents. Misused to manage “inappropriate” behaviors that are really misunderstood “communications” related to medical, emotional, or other issues. Too often, prior to administering psychotropics, essential information is not provided to the resident or his or her representative, individualized care plans are not maintained, and a dose reduction plan is not considered.
- Goals:**
1. Robust use of comprehensive informed written consent (IWC) form before the administration of psychotropics and any drug used for psychiatric purposes.
 2. Ongoing staff training on non-pharmacological approaches to help nursing home residents with medical, emotional, and other issues.
- Problem statement:** While psychotropics have numerous serious side effects for older adults, antipsychotics are particularly dangerous. The FDA issued its most dire “black box” warning against using any antipsychotic with older adults with dementia due to the related high mortality rate.¹ Yet, these drugs are often administered before other interventions. The current IWC process has been ineffective. Furthermore, misdiagnosing nursing home residents with schizophrenia, for which antipsychotics are allowed, means dispensing antipsychotics with impunity. Nearly 10% of MA nursing home residents are diagnosed with schizophrenia, even though it occurs in less than 1% of the US population.²
- Background:** The misuse and overuse of psychotropics can be deadly to older adults and must be subject to IWC and careful monitoring. For many years, MA has had one of the highest antipsychotic usage rates in the country. In early 2016, MA implemented IWC before administering psychotropic drugs to nursing home and rest home residents to protect these vulnerable populations. Still, high usage of antipsychotics persists in nursing homes: MA ranked the 6th highest in antipsychotic usage the country, with 18.8% of residents prescribed as of 2/1/22.³ As of 2021, 30-49% of residents in 77 of its 360 nursing homes were receiving antipsychotics, and 50-80% of residents in 14 homes.⁴
- Recommendations:**
- In order to protect nursing home residents and older adults in any venue:
1. Analyze use of antipsychotics and other psychotropics in nursing homes and in the community, including analyzing schizophrenic diagnoses in elders.
 2. Develop MA regulations to support a more robust IWC form and appropriate use of psychotropic medications.
 3. Provide ongoing staff training on nonpharmacological interventions.

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¹ The danger of atypical antipsychotic drug use on the elderly with dementia is addressed in the FDA's *Public Health Advisory: Deaths with Antipsychotics in Elderly Patients with Behavioral Disturbances*, US Food and Drug Administration (April 11, 2005).
<http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/PostmarketDrugSafetyInformationforPatientsandProviders/ucm053171.htm>.

FDA warning linking atypical and conventional antipsychotics with an increased risk of death in elderly patients treated for dementia-related psychosis. FDA also cautions that there is no approved drug for the treatment of dementia-related psychosis:
<http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/PostmarketDrugSafetyInformationforPatientsandProviders/ucm124830.htm>
<https://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/ucm124830.htm>

² As of the last available federal statistics (Q2 '21) Minimum Data Set <https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Computer-Data-and-Systems/Minimum-Data-Set-3-0-Public-Reports/Minimum-Data-Set-3-0-Frequency-Report>.

US schizophrenia <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/schizophrenia>

³ CMS Care Compare 2/1/22 - State Averages:

In file: Statistics/NH Compare Statistics/ NH Compare_2022 2.1/ _StateUSAverages_Feb2022.xls

⁴Percentage of long stay residents who received an antipsychotic medication, excludes residents diagnosed with schizophrenia, Huntington's, and Tourettes.

ME	20.73721
MS	19.94716
MO	19.88055
ND	19.65522
AL	19.52332
MA	18.80175

⁴ Long Term Care Community Coalition, "Antipsychotic Drugging Rates (Q2 2021) – Massachusetts," <https://nursinghome411.org/data/ap-drugs/ap-drug-q2-2021/>