

Aged care medication going unchecked

7 December 2020, by Pete McDonald



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New research from the Registry of Senior Australians at SAHMRI has shown just one in five older Australians receive a government-funded medication review after entering an aged care facility.

The study's lead researcher, Dr. Janet Sluggett from the University of South Australia said the findings point to potential dangers that demand attention.

"Residents are taking an average of 10 different medicines each day and this often includes medicines that need close monitoring such as antipsychotics, opioids, insulin and blood thinners," Dr. Sluggett said.

"These medicines can have beneficial effects for some people. But we've seen a sharp increase in the use of these medicines that when used incorrectly, can cause side effects such as drowsiness, confusion, falls and hospital visits."

During a [medication review](#), a pharmacist checks through all medicines prescribed and makes recommendations for improvements.

Guidelines recommend medication schedules are

reviewed on entry to an aged care facility. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has highlighted regular medication reviews as national priority area for people taking high-risk medicines such as antipsychotics.

Dr. Sluggett said some welcome changes have been made to the program since the study was conducted, but more needs to be done.

"People who receive a medication review can now get an extra two follow-up visits from a pharmacist and a variety of doctors can refer a resident for the service, in addition to the GP," Dr. Sluggett said.

"But we still urgently need strategies to address medication safety issues for all of those in aged care who aren't getting their schedules reviewed."

Overall the medication review service is under-used. The study revealed just 6% of all facilities in Australia reviewed more than half of all new residents medication programs.

Older people who may be concerned about their medication are being encouraged to ask their doctor about a review.

"There is no charge for a medication review when your doctor provides a referral letter. If you, or a family member are living in an aged care facility and would like to have your medicines checked, ask your pharmacist, GP or nurse about how to access this free service," Dr. Sluggett said.

"There is a similar medication review service available for people living in their own home."

Jane Mussared, Chief Executive of COTA SA, the peak body representing older people, said the findings show an urgent need for medication reviews to occur routinely for all those living in aged care.

"The [evidence base](#) for regular medication reviews as we age is well established and compelling. That

many residents of aged care miss out is appalling,"
Ms Mussared said.

The study, published in the Journal of the American Medical Directors Association, analysed data collected from 143,676 residents across all 2799 aged care facilities nationally between 2012 and 2015.

Provided by University of South Australia

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