



# Straight Talk

## *A Fresh Approach to Senior Care Management*

### **Medication**

Winter 2001

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Welcome to another issue of *Straight Talk*, a publication of Innovative Healthcare Consultants, Inc. Our philosophy is that if we do the best for the patients, our work inevitably will be the best for families, health care providers and society. We come together to do the right thing.

There has been consistent concern that the number of medications taken by older adults can lead to an excess in disability and the potential for life-threatening illness. Every individual has a personal responsibility to be aware of the purpose and the characteristics of any medication they take. The rule of **RIGHT** applies here: **THE RIGHT MEDICATION IN THE RIGHT DOSAGE AT THE RIGHT TIME.**

Request that your primary physician review all of your medications, including vitamins, herbs and over the counter medications. This means taking all of your pill bottles to your doctor's appointment and reviewing the medications and dosages. You can also ask your pharmacist if any of your prescriptions can have interactions. He can make recommendations to your physician.

Next, organize your medications. Keep a list of each medication: name, dosage, frequency of administration and start date. Keep this log with you and give a copy to a family member, caregiver and physician. Develop a system for keeping track of when your medications are to be taken. A plastic container labeled for this purpose is helpful. If your memory is failing, having a responsible person keeping track of your medications is one of the most important considerations to avoid errors in medication management.

Be sure each of your physicians is aware of all medications. Care giving can be an exhausting job, emotionally, physically and financially. Please be aware that there are some pharmaceutical interventions for behavioral management and early stage memory enhancements. Discuss any problems with your physician, describe the problem behavior, the time of day it occurs, how long it lasts, what triggered it and what helps control it. With this information, your physician will be able to advise you on medication management or necessary environmental changes.

A geriatric case manager can also assist with assessing, advocating and interpreting information to assist physicians and families in obtaining a clear plan of care and making them aware of all available options.

I hope you enjoy and gather some useful information from this issue of *Straight Talk*. I welcome all comments and questions.

Colleen

### **Elderly Run Risk for Dangerous Medicines**

Nearly one in 20 prescriptions given to the elderly during visits with physicians at hospital-affiliated outpatient departments involve a medication that experts agree generally should be avoided in the geriatric population, according to a recent study in the *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy*.

Age-related changes to the structure and function of various organs make certain drugs dangerous or even life-threatening in the elderly.\* For more information, please see page 3.

\* Case Management Advisor, June 1999

## Fifteen Questions to Ask About Your Medication\*



Here are some suggestions of questions to ask your physician when prescribing your medication:

1. What is the name of the drug (generic and brand names) and its strength?
2. What does the medication do?
3. How should the medication be taken?
4. When should it be taken?
5. Are there any foods or beverages which should or should not be taken with this medication?
6. What should I do if I miss a dose?
7. Where should the medication be stored?
8. What, if any, other medications will interact with this medication?
9. Based on my history, could I be allergic to this medication?
10. Are there any other drugs or medical conditions that would make it unwise for me to take this medication?
11. How will alcohol affect my taking of this medication?
12. What are the common side effects of this medication?
13. Will I experience any changes in the color of my urine or stool?
14. How long will I be taking this medication?
15. Can I drive or operate machinery while taking this medication?



\*Costco Pharmacy

## Nine Reasons Why Older Adults Are More Likely to Suffer From Adverse Drug Reactions:

- Smaller bodies and different body composition
- Increased sensitivity to many drugs
- Decreased ability of the liver to process drugs
- Decreased blood-pressure-maintaining drugs
- Decreased ability of the kidneys to clear drugs from the body
- More disease which affects the response to drugs
- More drugs and, therefore, more adverse drug reactions and interactions
- Inadequate testing of drugs in older adults before approval



## Beware of Mexican Drugs

More and more we hear individuals expressing excitement over their ability to buy drugs more cheaply in Mexico. However, no consideration is being made to (1) the quality of the drugs purchased, (2) are the purchased drugs labeled correctly, and (3) how well trained are the personnel of the pharmacies.

Before a drug is approved and allowed for sale in this country, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) investigates to determine whether the drug's benefits outweigh its negative aspects. However, since even an approved drug may not be totally harmless, and may cause adverse effects or other complications when taken with other medications, a prescription is required. The FDA also regulates whether a particular drug is manufactured according to approved methods to guarantee potency, that there are no contaminants or manufacturing errors in the process and that a particular manufacturing plant is capable of manufacturing the specific drug in question.

Drugs in Mexico are sold only in the manufacturer's unopened containers with no dosage directions. The drugs and their containers may look the same when, in fact, the label and/or the drugs may be counterfeit. The person in charge of a Mexican pharmacy may be the equivalent of a pharmacy technician or may not even have that much training. Drugs are also not monitored for drug effectiveness, adverse effects or drug interactions. If the patient's conditions worsen, it cannot be immediately known whether the condition is caused by a disease progression or a problem with the drug. There are good reasons why the FDA regulates drug manufacturing quality standards in the United States. For your own safety, fill your prescriptions at a pharmacy on **this** side of the border!

## Avoiding Herbal Supplements Before Surgery

An alert has been issued by the American Society of Anesthesiology to warn patients to stop taking herbal medicines at least two weeks before surgery. This alert is to prevent potentially dangerous interactions between herbs and drugs administered during surgery. The two weeks will allow time for the herbal medications to completely clear the body.



Most herbal medicine users never disclose to their physicians about the products they are taking because they consider them “natural” so they must be safe. The myth lies in the fact that herbal products are quite potent and can be dangerous -- especially if the patient’s anesthesiologist or surgeon does not know that the patient is taking them.

### Did you know?

- \* St. John’s wort, taken by 7.5 million Americans to treat anxiety, depression and sleep disorders, may intensify or prolong the effects of some narcotic drugs and anesthetic agents.
- \* Ginko biloba is used by almost 11 million Americans to improve their memory and increase blood circulation, but may reduce platelets, which are needed for blood to clot.
- \* Ginseng, one of the most popular herbal preparations in the world, taken to boost vitality, has been associated with episodes of high blood pressure and rapid beating of the heart.

This potential interaction may also occur with drugs your physician may be prescribing. As a precaution, be sure to let your physician know what herbs you are taking. For a description of 50 common herbs and their potential interactions with regular drugs, please give us a call.

### Medicare Update

If you have trouble paying your Part B Medicare Medical Insurance monthly premium of \$50, or if you never signed up for Part B because you could not afford it, here is some good news. If you have Medicare and limited income and assets, your state may help you pay your Part B premium and other medical expenses. For more information, contact your state or local Medicaid, social services or welfare office or call 1-800-MEDICARE.

## Dangerous Drug Interaction

*“Adverse drug events, which include medication errors and interactions, are the 6th leading cause of death, killing at least 100,000 people annually”\**

Roughly 2 1/2 billion prescriptions are filled in the U.S. pharmacies every year. Americans take a lot of medicine and with so many drugs out there, mishaps are almost bound to happen.

Medication mismanagement is common among the elderly population. Over-and-under prescribing, noncompliance, over the counter medications, inadequate monitoring and a host of other issues all contribute to adverse drug reactions in the elderly. Chronic disorders like high blood pressure, diabetes, pulmonary or respiratory problems are conditions which often have to be treated by several different specialty physicians. It is easy for multiple prescribers to add on medicines without seeing the big picture.



Buyers beware of the startling statistics and take a proactive approach to medication management.

\* Journal of the American Medical Association, 1998

### Drug Costs/Info

The Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) has published a directory of programs that provide assistance with drug costs on its Medicare.gov site. The directory ([www.medicare.gov/Prescription/Home.asp](http://www.medicare.gov/Prescription/Home.asp)) allows you to select a state and zip code, as well as manufacturers and diseases and conditions you are especially interested in. It then provides a list of drug assistance programs that fit these criteria, along with contacts and frequently asked questions. For other programs and directories, see ElderWeb’s home page at [www.elderweb.com/default.php3?ageID=805](http://www.elderweb.com/default.php3?ageID=805) or Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association’s home page [www.phrma.org/patients](http://www.phrma.org/patients).

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A FRESH APPROACH TO  
SENIOR CARE MANAGEMENT.



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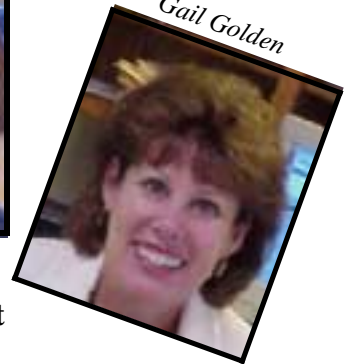
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## Mission Statement

Innovative Healthcare Consultants, Inc. is committed to assisting individuals and their families plan for and access all levels of health care necessary to maximize their health, independence and safety.

Based on a thorough assessment, IHC will provide a professional and confidential review of funding and available health care options.

As a client advocate, IHC will assist with the development and implementation of an individualized plan to meet your health care needs.

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