

Helping The Elderly Avoid Prescription Drug Problems

According to the National Alliance for Caregiving, there are over 33 million people in the U.S. who care for an aging relative or friend. Caregivers need to be aware that drug errors can happen and may be serious, but often are preventable. The problem stems largely from the multiple drugs seniors are prescribed and the complex network of physicians and pharmacists caring for them. According to Medco Health Solutions, [BLUE WATER HOMECARE](#) Inc., the average senior takes nine prescription medications a year. One in four seniors sees four or more different physicians and uses three or more different pharmacies. To help prevent errors:

- Make and take a medication list including prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications, any vitamins or herbal supplements and present it to the doctor and pharmacist.
- Understand how medications should be administered, possible side effects and how to recognize if they occur. Changes such as poor eyesight, hearing trouble or decreased endurance may indicate an adverse reaction to a medication.
- Ask any specialist the patient sees to send a full medical report, including drugs prescribed, to the patient's primary care doctor. Seniors now also have to decide about the new Medicare Part D prescription drug program. It provides much-needed relief for many seniors with little or no drug coverage but may require research to determine which plan is best. Consider the following:

- **Weighing Medication Costs:** Seniors currently on medications should determine if the plan covers their drugs and at what cost. They should also consider the cost of generics since they may be substantially lower. In addition, under some plans the deductible is waived for generic drugs.
- **Access to Pharmacies:** Each plan has its own pharmacy network. If several months of the year are spent in another state, a national plan may be best. Some plans include a mail-order prescription service.
- **Patient Safety:** A plan that includes a drug utilization review (DUR) program that identifies potential errors provides an important safety net.

