Transcript

Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission

Reducing Use of Sedatives in Aged Care

**Presented by:**

Speaker

[*Opening visual of slide with text saying ‘Reducing Use of Sedatives in Aged Care’*]

[*The visuals during this video are of slides with text and animations representing what is being said at the time during the video*]

§(Music Playing)§

**Speaker:**

How you manage medications within your aged care service has a significant impact on those receiving care.

[*Visual of slide with text saying ‘Sedative medications’*]

Today we’ll be talking about the use of sedative medications. But it is important to remember that when making any decisions around medications and medication use you have a responsibility to involve the person and their substitute decision maker if they do not have capacity to consent.

To effectively care for a person you need to know them. Know their personal and medical history, their likes and dislikes and their treatment preferences. This will allow you to tailor your approach to achieve the best outcome for the person or where they do not have capacity, talk to their substitute decision maker to consider what they believe the person would have wanted themselves.

When considering or starting or changing medications the prescriber must obtain informed consent. Informed consent is permission given with full knowledge of the risks and benefits of treatment, along with available options.

[*Visual of slide with text saying ‘Informed consent is permission given with full knowledge of the risks and benefits of treatment, along with available options. It is legal and ethically required whenever decisions around medication are made.’*]

It is legally and ethically required whenever decisions around medication are made.

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[*Visual of slide with text saying ‘Psychotropic medications’*]

Older people are the highest users of psychotropic medications which are medicines that affect the mind, thinking, emotions and behaviour. We know that psychotropic medications, many of which have sedative properties, are used extensively throughout aged care services in Australia. These sedating medications are the medications we’re focusing on today.

Within this category of medication the Royal Commission into Quality and Safety in Aged Care found that the ones most commonly used to manage behaviour or sedate people are antipsychotics developed for use in people with severe mental illness such as schizophrenia, and benzodiazepines, anti-anxiety or sleeping pills.

While sedating medications are often used in aged care to manage behaviours like agitation, anxiety, sleeplessness, calling out and wandering, there is little evidence that this is beneficial. The long term use of benzodiazepines also leads to any potential benefits reducing over time. When considering the use of all medications including sedatives you need to weigh up the potential benefits against the possible risks to determine if the medication will improve a person’s quality of life.

Another key consideration in decision making is to ensure that every person’s basic human rights are met. It is important to understand that using sedating medications can impact upon a person’s rights to both freedom of movement and their freedom of thought. These medications can significantly change how a person behaves and interacts with other people and their environment. The use of these medications can therefore prevent people from enjoying their best quality of life.

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There are risks connected with the use of sedative medications which can affect many parts of the body and lead to medical complications, including confusion, drowsiness and dry eyes, constipation, reduced appetite and urinary tract infections, restlessness, falls and fractures, pressure injury, stroke and sometimes even death.

The medial side effects of sedative medication can be severe but for older people taking these medications may also result in a reduced ability to take part in activities they want to do and reduced interaction with other residents, staff, relatives and friends. So taking sedating medications is not only potentially harmful in older people, it can also significantly reduce their independence and quality of life.

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May older people arrive at a residential aged care service with an existing medication regimen, often including sedating medications. It can be hard for the service to know why these were prescribed and so often people end up staying on these medications even when they are not providing any benefit.

In reality medications are often not the most effective way of managing behaviours like agitation, anxiety, sleeplessness, calling out and wandering. Unfortunately many people, including health practitioners, believe that these medications are more effective than the evidence suggests and that they make it easier to care for their residents.

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[*Visual of slide with text saying ‘Person-centred ways of managing behaviours’*]

But there are often better, more person-centred ways of managing behaviours which improve a person’s quality of life. For example trying to understand if a person is afraid, lonely or bored. Are they missing someone or something? Knowing what may unsettle the person and what works to comfort or satisfy them gives them pleasure and best meets their needs.

An aggressive or distressed person may have many reasons or triggers and medication is usually not the best way to address these. However there may be times when sedating medications are necessary when a person is at risk of harm or harming others. If needed as a last resort ensure that medications are used to achieve their best effect. Always start with a low dose and use for the shortest time needed. And as always ensure that you have informed consent.

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For people having these treatments, reviewing them frequently is essential, as many people only require them for a short time. You should aim to monitor them for sedation and other harmful effects, review them regularly, at least every three months, and reduce doses gradually where possible, within guidelines, and using a person-centred approach.

You need to make sure that the medication is still required and having the desired effect, and the negative impact of the medication doesn’t outweigh its benefits. To effectively reduce the use of sedatives you should engage with all the people involved. That means working together in an interdisciplinary way with nurses, carers, prescribers, pharmacists or residents or their substitute decision maker, and the people who care for them, reviewing to keep the harmful sedating effects to a minimum and aiming to reduce sedative use whenever possible.

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[*Closing visual of slide with text saying ‘Australian Government with Crest (logo)’, ‘Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission’, ‘RedUSe’, ‘Reducing Use of Sedatives’, ‘pharmacyunit@agedcarequality.gov.au’*]

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