

# Medication Management BY ELIZABETH SCHUDA

**M**edication management programs vary drastically from one long-term care facility to the next. Medication cards, pillow packs and bottle systems are among the variety of applied practices at LTC facilities. Whichever system your facility uses, it's crucial to teach patients and their families the essentials of medication management. Whether a resident is spending a weekend away from the facility or a physician has ordered that she administer her own medications, education and understanding are key to medication safety.

Deborah Davis, MSW, the behavioral team coordinator at Parkhouse Providence Pointe in Montgomery County, Pa., says that fewer people are requesting to administer their own medication. In fact, most facilities are working under the assumption that when admitted, a resident does not need medicine unless they have a pre-existing medical condition. And because of the plethora of regulations, LTC facilities are held to a higher standard of medication management, drastically lowering the chance of mistakes.

However, when residents or family members do need to administer medication, you must conduct an extensive evaluation to make sure they're capable of the responsibilities. Davis suggests meeting with them face-to-face in a quiet place where there will be as little distraction as possible. Be sure to choose a time when they are receptive to the information you are providing and address the following important points:

- It's crucial to only rely on credible information. Residents and families can find plenty of information on the Internet, but they may not know how to gauge what is credible. Teach them how to identify reputable sources and warn them against taking advice from family and friends who are not medical experts. Remind them that, when in doubt, they need not look further than the facility staff.
- Medication can be harmful if misused. Under no circumstance should anyone share, misuse or abuse their medication. Make residents and their families aware that all medications have the potential for an interaction with another and explain that they should not administer medication without a doctor's order—even if it's over the counter.
- Results aren't instant. Most LTC facilities will start with a very small dose of medication and slowly raise it to a therapeutic level of effectiveness. Because most residents are unaware of how the medication works, they may prematurely consider it ineffective. They may request a larger dose of

medication or a new one. Restarting a lengthy process will only postpone results even further.

- Communication is imperative. Make sure that the resident or family member shares everything they know about allergic reactions, medical history and current and past medications. Explain that communication is vital to reduce the chance of any drug interactions and encourage them to ask questions.
- Encourage teamwork. The best results come from teamwork between the resident, family and LTCF professionals. Respectful communication is essential to keeping everyone as healthy and happy as possible. Encourage residents and their families to be vocal about their opinions, concerns and observations.
- Stress the importance of a medication schedule. It is especially important to consistently maintain regularity. Scheduling should be the result of careful planning between the resident and LTC staff. Suggest techniques such as using Post-it notes, e-mail alerts and phone alarms, or placing a daily schedule in a high traffic area of the house.
- Review all aspects of self-administering medication. Go over the important points, including drug-to-drug interactions and drug-to-food interactions. Have residents explain to you their medication schedule and what methods they will implement. Make sure all the residents' and family members' questions are answered before they begin self-administering medicine. ■

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**Elizabeth Schuda** is a freelance writer.

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