

The Ministry of Health studied the use of atypical antipsychotic medication use in long-term care facilities in 2011. The report highlighted that “inappropriate medication or medication errors among seniors have long been identified as causes of adverse events, including unnecessary visits to ER or admission to hospital.

These drugs were developed for the treatment of psychotic symptoms and conditions but are being used for behavioural and psychological symptoms (including anxiety, agitation, aggression and insomnia). In June 2005, Health Canada issued an advisory notice stating: “...treatment with atypical anti-psychotic medication of behavior disorders in elderly patients is associated with an increased risk of all-cause mortality. Except for risperidone (RESPIRDAL) these medications are not approved for use in the elderly patients with dementia.”.

Pharmanet data from April 2010 to June 2011 showed that 50.3 percent of residential care patients with prescribed antipsychotic medication. This compares with 37.7% in 2001/02 and 47% in 2006/07.

The BC report highlighted the issue of consent. The current suggestion is that all patients or their substitute decision maker be advised of the prescription of these drugs. This is mandatory if the agent is being used to manage excessive behaviours as this is considered a form of restraint.

Management of excessive behaviours is difficult and challenging. Our long-term care facilities are struggling to supply environmental and individualized behaviour management. On occasion we are forced to resort to the use of these medications.

My suggestion to you is to request behaviour charting with a description of the behaviour and the frequency. This will give you a baseline on which to monitor the effectiveness of the medications. Secondly, I would suggest you time limit the prescription. Dementia is progressive and behaviours do improve with time and other interventions.

Finally, remember to consider other triggers of excessive behaviours. These include but are not limited to constipation, fecal impaction, infections, and pain.