

ANTIPSYCHOTICS IN NURSING FACILITIES DRAW SENATE ATTENTION

CAPITAL NEWS



'Part D prescription drug plans are not able to adequately prevent inappropriate payments for drugs.'

THE SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON

AGING recently held a hearing to examine the overuse of antipsychotic drugs to care for nursing facility residents, notably those suffering with dementia, and the extensive prescription of such medications for off-label uses that do not meet Medicare coverage requirements.

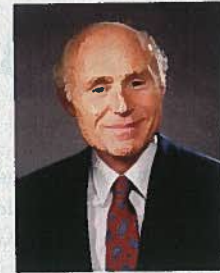
Committee Chairman Herb Kohl (D-Wis.) convened the hearing in the wake of a report released this past spring by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG), "Medicare Atypical Antipsychotic Drug Claims for Elderly Nursing Home Residents".

Kohl said it was important for the health of nursing facility residents as well as the

financial costs of overprescribing to get a handle on the situation now, just as millions of baby boomers are entering retirement age, swelling the ranks eligible for the Medicare program.

Daniel Levinson, HHS inspector general, told the committee while he did not think doctors and providers were overprescribing for any reason other than to help care for patients, the high rate of prescribing the drugs and the off-label use of antipsychotics was a significant problem.

"These findings [in the HHS OIG report] indicate that Medicare is paying for drugs that it should not, and Part D



Kohl

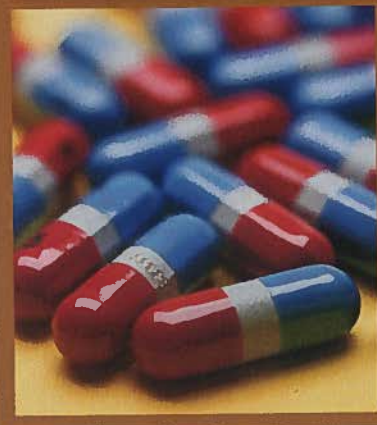
prescription drug plans are not able to adequately prevent inappropriate payments for drugs, including antipsychotics, for uses that do not meet coverage requirements," he said. "In addition, nursing homes often

fail to comply with regulations designed to prevent overmedication of these powerful and at times dangerous drugs."

Recommendations in the HHS OIG report called for nursing facilities to better monitor their practices when it comes to antipsychotic drugs. Other steps to help ease the problem include enhancing claims data to ensure accurate coverage.

—Patrick Connoles

MASSACHUSETTS SEEKS TO REDUCE ANTIPSYCHOTICS IN NURSING HOMES



THE MASSACHUSETTS

SENIOR CARE Foundation has launched a one-year pilot program to promote resident-centered care and reduce the use of antipsychotic medications in Massachusetts nursing facilities.

Funded by the Commonwealth Corp. through an Extended Care Career Ladder Initiative grant, the project will include 11 nursing facilities as pilot sites.

The program starts at a time when the federal government is focusing attention on overuse of antipsychotics in nursing facilities across the country, namely for residents suffering from dementia.

The pilot will build on initial work done with the OASIS curriculum developed by Susan Wehry, a geriatric psy-

chiatrist who is now the commissioner of the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living at the Vermont Agency of Human Services.

The OASIS curriculum focuses on helping nursing facility staff understand and respond to the needs of each resident in order to develop and refine behavioral strategies that will improve the resident's quality of life and job satisfaction for staff members.

Mass Senior Care and a project leader will provide technical support to pilot facilities. There will also be ongoing coaching calls and on-site visits, combined with quarterly in-person meetings for OASIS coordinators from each of the pilot sites.

For more information, contact Laurie Herndon at (617) 558-0202.

—Patrick Connoles