Appropriate Use of Antipsychotic Medications

The Goal

Appropriate Use of Antipsychotic (AUA) Medications aims to reduce antipsychotic use in persons with dementia. Risks and side-effects of these medications include agitation, confusion, falls, insomnia and sedation, along with increased risk of infection, strokes and cardiac events. The AUA project helps staff enhance care by focusing on personcentred approaches. Care teams consider each person's unique life story, look for underlying reasons for agitation and address needs. A dementia-friendly approach requires families, physicians and staff to work together to investigate and trial approaches to reduce agitation and anxiety.

The Process

The process includes staff education, discussions with family members, and development of resident-specific care plans. A monthly inter-professional medication review tracks, assesses and reduces inappropriate use of these medications. Resources to support the AUA Project include learning workshops, monthly curbside consultation call-in sessions, video conferences and the AUA Toolkit of resources: www.albertahealthservices.ca/auatoolkit.asp.

The Outcome

The AUA project was introduced to all 170 Alberta Long Term Care (LTC) facilities (14,500 beds) in 2014/15 after 11 early adopter LTC sites reduced antipsychotic use by 50% in 2013/14.

The project is being shared with 165 Supportive Living facilities, and piloted in 9 acute care sites. Antipsychotic use in Alberta LTC has decreased by more than 30% in the past 2.5 years. Just 17.1% of Alberta's LTC residents (without a chronic mental health condition) are using antipsychotic medications, compared to the national average of 21.2% (2017-18). Families are pleased that loved ones are more alert, independent, communicative and happy. Care teams report residents are calmer, more active and easier to care for.

The Team

The AUA project is led by the Seniors Health Strategic Clinic Network (SCN). The AUA project team was awarded the AHS President's Award for Excellence in Quality Improvement.

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