



**Process, Training
and Technology:**
The Keys to Preventing
Medication Errors in
Assisted Living





Overview

Medication errors are a serious and alarming trend, particularly in assisted living (AL) communities. According to the Institute of Medicine, an estimated 800,000 preventable medication-related injuries occur every year in U.S. long-term care (LTC) facilities. Worse, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that adverse drug events lead to more than 700,000 visits to the emergency department annually. Not only can medication errors seriously harm residents, but they can also cause both residents and operators to shoulder the significant economic burden of the increased cost of treatment.

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Although unintentional, most medication errors are triggered by human mistakes and can happen at any stage of the medication management process. Common missteps include prescribing a dose that is too high or too low, administering the incorrect medication to the wrong resident, omitting a dose, or administering the wrong strength or form of a drug.

Fortunately, by implementing procedures and processes and partnering with an LTC pharmacy, AL leaders and staff can identify and catch errors before it's too late.

In this guide, you will discover how standardizing processes, providing ongoing staff education and training and utilizing the latest technology can prevent medication errors and improve resident outcomes.

Standardize Processes

Establishing universal processes are crucial for reducing the probability of medication errors in AL communities. With consistent procedures in place, staff members are less likely to use their own methods and approaches, which can lead to mistakes.

Developing medication ordering, storage, and administration processes are the first important steps to improving accurate and safe medication practices:

- **Medication ordering**

To promote accuracy, protocols should be established for verifying medication orders with physicians, double-checking medication dosages and confirming allergies. A process for both scheduled and emergency orders should also be determined.

- **Medication storage**

Create clear medication storage guidelines to guarantee all medications are properly organized, and secured and stored at the appropriate temperature, according to their specific requirements.

- **Medication administration**

Establish procedures that incorporate medication carts and electronic medication administration record (eMAR) systems to ensure delivery of the right medication to the correct resident at the appropriate time. These tools help to maintain consistency and precision throughout the medication administration process, ultimately lowering the risk of errors.

As a safeguard, routine quality audits should be performed throughout medication ordering, storage and administration. Medication storage audits should involve careful review of medications housed in all medication storage areas for correct packaging, temperature, labeling and expiration dates. Scheduled medication cart audits should go beyond simply checking for expired medications but should also ensure that the contents of the medication cart match the medication administration record (MAR) and the physician's order sheet.

How a Long-Term Care Pharmacy Can Help

- ▶ Offers a medication management team that prioritizes getting to know your staff and residents' medication needs, addressing all concerns
- ▶ Assigns a consultant pharmacist with a 360-degree view of each resident's entire drug regimen that works closely with your staff and residents' doctors to ensure appropriate medication combinations and eliminate errors during med pass
- ▶ Provides consistent packaging that separates medications by date and time, making it easy to administer the right medications at the right time
- ▶ Guarantees regular review of each resident's drug regimen, including new medications



Conduct Ongoing Staff Training & Education

For AL communities to limit errors, each staff member should receive training and education regularly. Any instruction should include the seven rights of medication administration: right patient, right drug, right dose, right time, right route, right reason and right documentation.

Although state requirements may vary, it is important that staff training and education at a minimum cover these core components:

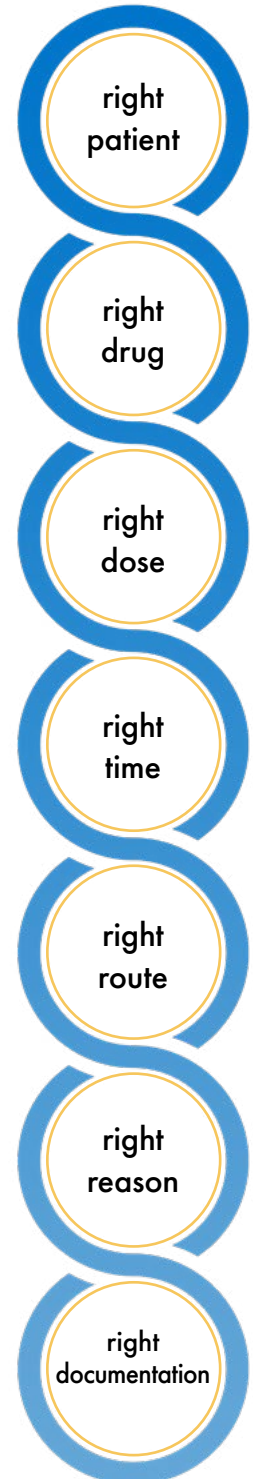
- Importance of being familiar with each resident, including their health conditions, allergies and reason for receiving each medication
- How to use a drug reference manual to find drug information
- Correct medication preparation, including infection prevention and control
- Appropriate medication administration techniques for each route of administration
- Monitoring methods to assess medication effectiveness and identify adverse events
- Knowledge of what to report to the nurse or prescriber and when to report it
- Proper documentation procedures

Staff must also be aware of the challenges posed by look-alike and sound-alike medications, as well as high-risk drug classes. Medications with similar names, packaging or labeling can create confusion and administration errors that could lead to harmful resident outcomes. High-risk drug classes, such as opioid pain medications, antidiabetic agents, blood thinners and antiplatelet agents, are associated with higher incidences of medication errors and account for over 50% of emergency room visits for medication-related adverse events in Medicare patients¹. As a result, it is vital to equip staff with strategies to minimize risks associated with these drug classes and look-alike/sound-alike medications.

How a Long-Term Care Pharmacy Can Help

- ▶ Delivers in-depth medication management training and guidance about the seven rights of medication administration, including how to verify the resident's identity, check medication labels for accuracy, measure the correct dosage and administer medications at the appropriate time and route
- ▶ Conducts extensive eMAR training and medication cart audits to learn how to properly document medication administration, organize a med cart for med pass and prepare for surveys
- ▶ Provides onsite education about high-risk medications, e.g., hypoglycemic agents, antibiotics, opioids and naloxone and issues like fall prevention and infection control
- ▶ Offers unlimited direct access to a consultant pharmacist and nurse account manager to assist with policies, procedures and recommendations to maintain safety and compliance

Seven Rights of Medication Administration





Utilize the Latest Technology

Technology is a powerful tool for enhancing medication safety. By streamlining processes, improving communication and providing valuable data and insights, technology can revolutionize medication management. Tools worth considering include:

- **Electronic health records (EHR) and eMARs**
These technologies enable quick access to resident medication profiles and history and allow staff to update and order medications with greater accuracy. E-prescribing reduces the risk of errors when MARs are hand transcribed. Integration with a community's EHR or eMAR system can lead to seamless, accurate medication records, making it important to work with a pharmacy that interfaces with this technology.
- **Real-time pharmacy data & communication**
Access to a web portal provides AL staff with a comprehensive view of resident and medication information in real time and secure messaging apps provide direct communication with the pharmacy. Staff can view medical records, electronic prescriptions received by the pharmacy, clarify orders through secure smartphone texting, and even view proof of medication delivery signatures.
- **Clinical interventions & insights**
Leveraging technology, communities can access programs that measure the clinical impact of their pharmacy team. This includes gaining visibility into the clinical decisions and interventions their pharmacists make every day before dispensing medications to safeguard residents. Communities can track and analyze this information, using the data to identify high-risk areas and improve care.
- **Barcode scanning**
Implementing barcode scanning technology guarantees that medications are administered to the right resident at the right time. It's also a valuable tool for streamlining the medication destruction process, saving time and reducing the risk of drug diversion, especially when dealing with controlled substances awaiting disposal.

How a Long-Term Care Pharmacy Can Help

- ▶ Provides smart compliance packaging that is barcoded and separates medications by day and hour, reducing errors and simplifying dispensing
- ▶ Offers complete integration with the community's EHR or eMAR ensuring accurate medication records and reducing possible eMAR omissions or errors that could lead to liability issues
- ▶ Enables access to data and resident-level reporting to help drive improved clinical care
- ▶ Streamlines medication management and offers real-time communication between the pharmacy and AL staff through a single interface and direct HIPAA-compliant messaging

Partnering with an LTC Pharmacy for Prevention

Adopting the right processes, training and technology can help AL communities bolster their medication management systems and reduce the risk of medication errors, resulting in improved resident outcomes. Partnering with an LTC pharmacy that offers ongoing training and education, access to the latest technology and reliable processes, communities can help AL staff minimize errors and enhance resident wellbeing and quality of life.

¹ Budnitz DS, Shehab N, Kegler SR, Richards CL. Medication use leading to emergency department visits for adverse drug events in older adults. *Ann Intern Med.* 2007;147(11):755-765. doi:10.7326/0003-4819-147-11-200712040-00006





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