

## OLDER AND WISER: Report looks at prescriptions

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A recent UBC media release notes cost may be keeping some older people from getting the prescription drugs they need. file photo Paul Mcgrath, North Shore News

Do you or someone you know skip their medications because of the cost?

Have you felt that you or your loved one is being overprescribed medications or that perhaps you or they are getting the wrong medication?

Issues and concerns about medication use for older adults are on the rise.

A Feb. 1 media release called Older Canadians Skip Meds Due to Cost, Putting Them at Risk for Complications, put out by the University of British Columbia says “One in 12 Canadians aged 55 and older skipped prescriptions due to cost in 2014, the second highest rate among comparable countries.”

According to the press release, research showed that Canadians who did not have insurance were “twice as likely to report not filling prescriptions because of cost.”

It also showed that low-income Canadians were “three times more likely to report financial barriers to filling prescription medicines than high-income respondents.”

The Fair PharmaCare Plan in B.C. will pay for part or all of the cost of drugs once the net family income deductible has been reached. Until the deductible is reached seniors may need to have a private insurer or pay the costs up to the deductible amount themselves. For many seniors this could be a financial burden.

Many of us have heard of seniors having to make a choice between medications and other necessities such as food or hydro.

Not taking prescribed medications can have serious implications for older adults according to the UBC research.

“When patients stop filling their prescriptions their conditions get worse and they often end up in hospital requiring more care, which in the long run costs us more money,” said Steve Morgan, senior author of the UBC study and professor in UBC’s School of Population and Public Health.

In Canada the older you get the more drugs you are likely to take. Data from various sources has shown that two-thirds of Canadians over 65 have five or more different prescriptions and one-quarter take 10 or more prescription drugs. In care facilities the number of drugs a senior takes can reach a total of 25. While skipping medications is risky, overprescribing medication for older adults can also be a problem.

A November 2016 B.C. Seniors Advocate report called Making Progress: Placement, Drugs and Therapy Update found that many older adults in B.C. care facilities are being overprescribed medications, such as antipsychotics and antidepressants.

The good news in the report found that B.C. has experienced a 14 per cent decrease in the rate of antipsychotics since 2015. But B.C.’s numbers are still higher than many provinces.

A March 9, 2016 Globe and Mail article by Andre Picard said that in 2014 Canadians spent \$28.8 billion on prescription drugs. Picard asked, “How many of those prescriptions were unnecessary, inappropriate or harmful?”

Both Picard and the B.C. Seniors Advocate say that most prescribing is well-intentioned and appropriate. But Picard says that “it’s also unco-ordinated; there is a tendency to overmedicate and leave people on drugs for too long.” He further says that “a growing body of research shows that polypharmacy – the simultaneous use of multiple drugs – can lead to all manner of unexpected interactions.”

Mistakes can be made in prescribing medications as well. Some types of mistakes include not noting possible allergic reactions, errors filling the prescription, prescribing the wrong dosage, prescribing unnecessary medications and not being aware of unhealthy interactions.

It is important to be aware of all your drugs and to regularly take the time to check these out with your pharmacist.

Your doctor or pharmacist should be willing to spend time with you or the person you are caring for to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about the medications you have been prescribed.

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