

# U.S. program targets antipsychotic drug use in nursing homes

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Many dementia patients getting these drugs as chemical restraints, officials say.

(HealthDay) -- U.S. health officials said Wednesday that they're hoping to reduce the use of antipsychotic drugs among nursing home residents by 15 percent before year's end.

To achieve that goal, the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) said it's launching the Partnership to Improve Dementia Care. The partnership involves federal and state officials, nursing homes and other providers, [advocacy groups](#) and caregivers.

According to CMS, overuse of [antipsychotic drugs](#) in nursing home patients suffering from dementia is a significant problem. CMS statistics indicate that in 2010, more than 17 percent of nursing home patients had daily doses exceeding recommended levels.

"We seek to ensure that nursing homes provide the best resident-centered care by creating a familiar and comfortable [home environment](#) where residents' autonomy and choices in their personal lifestyle are honored," Dr. Shari Ling, CMS deputy chief medical officer, said during an afternoon news conference.

The goal of the program is to protect patients from unnecessary drug use, she said.

Use of antipsychotic drugs has grown and many of these drugs are used by patients diagnosed with dementia who can't always communicate their needs, Ling said.

Speaking at the news conference, Claire Curry, legal director of the Civil Advocacy Program at the Legal Aid Justice Center, said that "[consumer advocates](#) across the country are pleased to see CMS launch this initiative."

"The drugging of nursing home residents has long been a national disgrace," she said, adding that hundreds of thousands of long-term care residents are drugged inappropriately, costing hundreds of millions of dollars.

These drugs carry a black box warning from the U.S. [Food and Drug Administration](#) that they cause death in [dementia patients](#), Curry said.

"Advocates welcome every step taken to raise awareness about the dangers, to end unnecessary drugging and the harm it brings residents and to strictly enforce rules already in place to protect residents from unnecessary drugs, especially antipsychotics being used as chemical restraints," she said.

The CMS initiative includes:

- Training that emphasizes high-quality care for nursing home patients.
- Making data on antipsychotic drug use at nursing homes available on the website Nursing Home Compare.
- Suggesting alternatives to antipsychotics such as exercise, outdoor time, pain management and planned activities for patients.

**More information:** For more on dementia, visit the [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#).

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