

# What impact do medication errors have on nursing home residents?

November 21 2016

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A new analysis points to surprisingly low rates of serious impacts from medication errors affecting nursing home residents, despite the fact that these errors remain fairly common. The investigators noted that it's unclear whether medication errors resulting in serious outcomes are truly infrequent or are under-reported due to the difficulty in ascertaining them. The findings are published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

Medication errors can cause considerable harm, and [older adults in nursing homes](#) may be especially vulnerable. To assess the prevalence of [medication errors](#) leading to hospitalizations and deaths in nursing home [residents](#), and to determine the factors associated with these errors, Joseph Ibrahim, MBBS, FRACP, PhD, an academic physician in geriatric medicine at Monash University in Australia, and his colleagues conducted a literature search of relevant studies published between 2000 and 2015. After identifying 11 studies, the researchers examined three types of medication errors: all medication errors, transfer-related medication errors, and potentially inappropriate medications.

Medication errors were common, involving 16 percent to 27 percent of residents in studies examining all types of medication errors. Transfer-related medication errors occurred in 13 percent to 31 percent of residents, while 75 percent of residents were prescribed at least one potentially inappropriate medication.

The team found that serious impacts of medication errors were

surprisingly low, however, and they were reported in only zero to one percent of medication errors, with death being a rare event.

"This is an important step to addressing the global issue for improving the quality and safety of medications for older people," said Prof. Ibrahim. "Nursing homes should review their systems of care from prescribing to administration. Good practice requires using a team-based approach involving the resident, care and nursing staff, pharmacists, and medical practitioners."

**More information:** "A systematic review of the prevalence of medication errors resulting in hospitalization and death of nursing home residents. Noha Ferrah, Janaka J. Lovell, and Joseph E. Ibrahim. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*; Published Online: November 21, 2016 [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.14683](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.14683)

Provided by Wiley

Citation: What impact do medication errors have on nursing home residents? (2016, November 21) retrieved 28 February 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-11-impact-medication-errors-nursing-home.html>

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