

Alzheimer's
Care Group



New Survey Shows Seniors Struggle Under the Weight of Multiple Medication Use

- Increased health risks and financial concerns burden seniors with highest medication use

- One in four seniors take between 10 and 19 pills a day

FRANKLIN LAKES, N.J., Dec. 29 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- America's seniors are being overwhelmed by the number of prescription drugs they take on a daily basis. According to a new national survey of more than 1,000 people ages 65 and older who use medications, more than half (51 percent) take at least five different prescription drugs regularly and one in four take between 10 and 19 pills each day.

The challenge of managing multiple medications is clear - nearly three in five (57 percent) of those polled admit that they forget to take their medications. Furthermore, the more drugs they use, the more likely they are not to remember to take them. Among those using five or more medications, 63 percent say they forget doses; a higher rate as compared to 51 percent among people who take fewer medicines.

"It's usually the patients who are in worse health who are taking large numbers of prescription drugs. For these people, especially, taking their medications properly and regularly is critical," said Dr. Woody Eisenberg, vice president and chief medical officer of Medco Retiree Solutions. "The problem is that the more medications prescribed, the harder it is for older people to manage them well and know essential information that can help prevent medication-related harm."

The survey, conducted by Kelton Research on behalf of Medco Health Solutions, Inc. (NYSE: [MHS](#)) also reveals what seniors don't know about their medications could potentially harm them, and the more medications they take, the less they seem to know. More than one third (34 percent) of seniors using five or more prescription drugs do not feel knowledgeable enough about the drugs they're prescribed or their potential side effects, and 35 percent are not sure they can name all the medications they use.

"Being well-informed about medications is crucial for patient safety," said Dr. Eisenberg. "To reduce drug risks, patients should always know the names of the drugs they take, why they take them, and any drugs they should avoid to prevent potential side effects."

Costly Concerns

Multiple medication use is also taking its toll on the financial health of America's seniors. The ability to afford their drugs is the top concern among 40 percent of seniors taking five or more prescription medications daily, followed by their worry over drug side effects (23 percent) and interactions (17 percent). Among those enrolled in a Medicare Part D plan, 37 percent are most concerned about not being able to afford their medications, and almost half (49 percent) want to know how to delay or avoid falling into the donut hole or coverage gap - the phase in which the beneficiary is responsible for the full cost of their drugs.

The survey found 60 percent of Medicare beneficiaries have taken some steps to delay reaching the donut hole, such as using generic medications (76 percent) and asking for free samples from their doctors (39 percent). But just 27 percent use mail order to avoid the donut hole, despite the fact that on average, seniors surveyed estimated that using mail order saved them about \$540 a year and 19 percent estimated they saved at least \$1,000 annually.

"The Medicare prescription drug program has made a huge difference in making prescription drugs more affordable for seniors; but for those taking multiple medications, the costs can still be a major burden - especially if you end up in the donut hole," said Dr. Eisenberg. "It's essential that enrollees take advantage of cost-savings opportunities so they can afford the drugs they need to maintain their health."

Medco is launching an initiative to assist seniors and Medicare beneficiaries in better managing their medications and getting the most out of their Medicare plan. As part of the initiative, Medco has developed a free consumer booklet called "*The Smart Guide to Managing Medications*." It provides tips to help seniors better manage their medications and their costs, and includes information to discuss with their physicians and pharmacists about the drugs they're prescribed. The guide also offers ways to manage medication costs within the Medicare Part D benefit. "*The Smart Guide to Managing Medications*" is available free in a downloadable version at www.medcomedicare.com. Seniors can also request a copy through the mail by sending a postcard requesting "*The Smart Guide to Managing Medications*" to: "The Smart Guide to Managing Medications"; PO Box 8007; Parsippany, NJ 07054-8007.

Medco Medicare Part D PDP members have access to a number of support services that can help them better manage their medication routine. These services include: specialist pharmacists trained in the medications used to treat chronic and complex conditions such as diabetes and high cholesterol; Medicare advisors available 24/7 to help seniors understand how to lower cost medication options and Coverage Gap communications that inform members about their proximity to the coverage gap and educate them about how to delay reaching the Coverage Gap and lower their overall annual prescription costs.

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