

Dangerous Mental Health Practices Must Stop on Our Elderly in Nursing Homes

CCHR, a mental health industry watchdog, responds to a federal investigation launched against the harmful drugging of the elderly in nursing homes.

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, January 30, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On Wednesday, January 18th, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced that it was launching a targeted crackdown on certain nursing homes that are misdiagnosing seniors with schizophrenia and treating them with dangerous antipsychotic drugs.[1]



CCHR, a mental health industry watchdog, responds to a federal investigation launched against the harmful drugging of the elderly in nursing homes. It demands effective oversight and penalties to stop such dangerous mental health practices.

Mental health industry watchdog, [Citizens Commission on Human Rights International \(CCHR\)](#) commends HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra for launching the investigation, but adds that it is imperative that the government act effectively on the results of any investigation findings. This is because the kind of abuse being uncovered today has been perpetrated on our seniors for decades, with earlier promises that it would be corrected.

Becerra stated: "The steps we are taking today will help prevent these errors and give families peace of mind." [2]

Unfortunately, his HHS predecessors have made similar assurances.

The HHS announcement of the commencement of the current investigation notes that in 2012, the federal government began tracking when nursing homes used antipsychotics on residents.[3] Despite this, evidence has mounted since then of some facilities administering antipsychotic drugs to sedate them, despite dangerous side effects that could include death.[4]

Assurances were made in 2011 by then-HHS Inspector General Daniel R. Levinson, who exposed the drug abuse of nursing home residents at the time: “Government, taxpayers, nursing home residents, as well as their families and caregivers, should be outraged—and seek solutions. Despite the fact that it is potentially lethal to prescribe antipsychotics to patients with dementia, there’s ample evidence that some drug companies aggressively marketed their products toward such populations, putting profits before safety.”[5]

During the time the government said it was “monitoring” the toxic assault on seniors, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued two “black box” warnings citing increased risk of death when antipsychotics are used in elderly patients with dementia.[6] (Many of these nursing homes are misdiagnosing dementia as schizophrenia to justify the use of antipsychotics).

As early as 2002 CCHR engaged in personal visits to Congress alerting legislators to this tragedy.

Then, in frightening testimony given to Congress in 2007, then-FDA drug reviewer David Graham said that at least 15,000 residents had died in nursing homes from antipsychotics.[7]

In May 2012, U.S. Senators Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), Herb Kohl (D-Wisconsin), and Richard Blumenthal (D-Connecticut) filed an amendment to the Food and Drug Administration Safety and Innovation Act seeking to combat the costly, widespread, and inappropriate use of antipsychotics in nursing homes. “This amendment responds to alarming reports about the use of antipsychotic drugs with nursing home residents,” Grassley said.[8]

Following Senator Grassley’s efforts, antipsychotics for nursing home residents dropped to under 20% in recent years, according to federal data. However, the November 2022 report by HHS-OIG revealed that residents were still being wrongly diagnosed with schizophrenia in order to prescribe antipsychotics—a practice that skyrocketed between 2015 and 2019, with 99 nursing homes in the country claiming that an astonishing 20% or more of their residents had the “disorder.”[9] CMS says facilities may be dodging increased scrutiny around the gratuitous use of antipsychotic drugs by coding residents as having schizophrenia.[10]

CCHR says HHS needs to implement effective oversight, accountability, and penalties for rights violations, as nursing homes currently only get their wrist slapped.

It predicts we can expect the same wrist slap if civil, financial, and criminal penalties are not enacted, both for prescribers and facilities. In its recent statement, HHS stopped short of threatening to levy fines against facilities. The agency does not have plans to immediately intervene in the patients’ care directly or notify relatives of residents who have been wrongly coded or given antipsychotics.[11]

The HHS-CMS investigation needs to determine why oversight has continually failed nursing home residents. If not done, in 10 years’ time, the death toll will have again unforgivably

mounted, and no doubt new assurances will be made that this dire situation needs correcting.

Accountability now requires substantial civil, financial and criminal penalties to be put in place, including against top prescribers and offending facilities. And for the elderly to be compensated when abused.

[Our senior citizens deserve nothing less](#), CCHR says.

[Read the full article here.](#)

[1] "Nursing Homes Under Investigation for Abuse of Antipsychotics," Newsmax.com, 18 Jan. 2023, <https://www.newsmax.com/health/health-news/nursing-homes-government-federal/2023/01/18/id/1104862/#ixzz7qnSdVO1S>

[2] "Feds to Investigate Nursing Home Abuse of Antipsychotics," U.S. News, 18 Jan. 2023, <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2023-01-18/feds-to-investigate-nursing-home-abuse-of-antipsychotics>

[3] <https://apnews.com/article/health-nursing-homes-medication-schizophrenia-ad76a524c9e97c5eaf857d89c4119b34>

[4] Op. cit., U.S. News, 18 Jan. 2023

[5] <https://www.cchrnt.org/2011/07/18/1-out-of-every-7-elderly-nursing-home-residents-on-antipsychotics-despite-risk-of-death/>, citing: Modern Medicine – July 16, 2011

[6] <https://www.cchrnt.org/2012/05/23/u-s-senators-file-amendment-to-combat-widespread-antipsychotic-drugging-of-elderly-in-nursing-homes/>

[7] <https://www.cchrnt.org/2021/03/16/elderly-should-study-warning-psychotropic-drug-risk-dementia/>; Testimony by Dr. David Graham, House Hearing, 110th Congress – The Adequacy of FDA to Assure the Safety of the Nation's Drug Supply General, 13 Feb. 2007, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-110hhrg35502/pdf/CHRG-110hhrg35502.pdf>, p. 66

[8] <https://www.cchrnt.org/2012/05/23/u-s-senators-file-amendment-to-combat-widespread-antipsychotic-drugging-of-elderly-in-nursing-homes/>

[9] Op. cit., Newsmax.com, 18 Jan. 2023

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

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