The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) launched the “National Partnership to Improve Dementia Care” initiative to reduce the use of atypical antipsychotic medications in elderly persons with dementia. Prior to the initiative’s launch in 2012, the CMS said nearly one out of four nursing home residents had received an antipsychotic medication at least once in the past week. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had also issued a boxed warning (often called a black box warning) directed at atypical antipsychotic use among elderly persons with dementia. This is the FDA’s strongest warning and means the drug carries a significant risk for serious or even life-threatening adverse effects. The most commonly prescribed antipsychotics include aripiprazole, quetiapine, olanzapine and risperidone.

The focus of CMS’ initiative is to reduce the unnecessary use of antipsychotic medications among the elderly population with dementia-related psychosis, and to better understand the root cause of dementia-related behaviors and address them by educating staff on non-pharmacological techniques. The initiative does not include nursing home residents with mental illness who have been on antipsychotic medications and under the care of a psychiatrist for many years.

The Arkansas Quality Partners (AQP) group is leading the CMS initiative in Arkansas. The AQP group was established in 2014 as a collaboration among the Arkansas Health Care Foundation (AHCF), the Arkansas Department of Human Services’ Office of Long Term Care (OLTC) and AFMC’s Arkansas Innovative Performance Program (AIPP).

The AHCF was created by the Arkansas Health Care Association in 2003 as a non-profit foundation to establish continuing public and professional education programs for the long-term care profession and support front-line caregivers. The OLTC is the state regulatory and licensing agency for nursing homes. It performs certification and complaint surveys on behalf of the CMS and state licensure surveys. Cooperative efforts with AQP allow the OLTC to engage nursing homes in quality improvement efforts to increase resident-centered care.

AFMC’s AIPP is a Medicaid-funded quality improvement program that began in 2005. It is designed to provide on-site assistance, training, education and resource development to Arkansas nursing homes and support long-term care initiatives in the state.

The AQP training is directed to nursing home staff and other medical professionals. The training includes resources, skills development and an understanding of how and when to use non-pharmacological, alternative techniques. The goal is to improve the quality of life for residents with dementia.

Nursing homes are encouraged to develop systematic efforts to identify opportunities to reduce or discontinue use of antipsychotic medications when appropriate. The entire interdisciplinary team is included: resident, key staff members, family members, physician and pharmacist.

The AQP’s initial training utilized the Positive Approach: I Make the Difference. This training method was modeled after the work of one of America’s leading educators on dementia, Teepa Snow. The program targeted direct care staff in nursing homes, rehabilitation centers and assisted living communities. Currently in its third grant year, the AQP team has trained more than 1,000 individuals in Arkansas.

The training addresses how dementia affects the brain and teaches communication techniques that promote non-pharmacological interventions such as connecting visually or verbally.
A CLOSER LOOK AT QUALITY

with the resident before providing care. Using non-pharmacological interventions promotes creative thinking about how to provide care. It encourages caregivers to learn about the individual’s past to engage with meaning, and to know his or her normal characteristics to recognize if the resident is becoming distressed. Other interventions include singing familiar songs and providing care “with” the person rather than “to” him.

After direct care staff was trained, it was suggested that nursing supervisors and other team members could also benefit from the training. Responding to the feedback, the AQP organized a modified version and directed it to floor nurse leaders. The training was made available to all three nursing shifts.

Most recently, AQP hosted a series of regional trainings titled “Long Term Care Efforts to Reduce Antipsychotics.” The training is designed specifically for medical directors, pharmacy consultants, administrators and directors of nursing. It presents an evidence basis for discontinuing antipsychotic usage and explains ways to improve communication between nurses and physicians to limit overprescribing. It includes how to develop strategies that address physicians’ prescribing practices.

Arkansas has shown substantial improvement and is now ranked 24th in the nation in prevalence of antipsychotic use for long-stay residents. Previously ranked 48th, Arkansas has shown a 40 percent relative rate of improvement since the initiative began. The national average for antipsychotic use by long-stay nursing home residents during the third quarter of 2016 was 16.1 percent. Arkansas’ average during the same period was 15.7 percent.

In 2017, AQP will launch a multilayered training program called “Dementia Care in the Long Term Care Setting: A Model for Well-being with a Proactive Person Approach.” The group’s educators and the AIPP team will receive a full-day dementia workshop based on the Eden Alternative Domains of Well-being™ created by Dr. G. Allen Power, MD, FACP. Dr. Power, an author and geriatrician, is well-known for his work in challenging the use of antipsychotic medications in elderly persons.

The AQP will provide this training in multiple formats around the state, including in-service training for selected nursing homes and at stakeholder events. Specific components of the training curriculum will be directed to nursing home leadership; others will be directed to certified nursing assistants or floor nurses. Continued support will be through tools distribution and a direct, boots-on-the-ground approach with long-term care staff.

With the support of Dr. Power, Dr. Angela Norman developed the “Model for Well-Being” training curriculum. It defines the application for all levels of caregivers to support the well-being-domains pyramid (Fig. 1). Caregivers must create an environment within each domain to reach the ultimate caregiver goal of joy for the individual.

Keeping the resident at the center of care will continue to be AQP’s focus. AQP believes antipsychotic reduction efforts are critical to enhance residents’ quality of life and quality of care using evidence-based best practices.

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