Polypharmacy Problems

Patients who take more than one medicine can have a problem with drug interactions. Furthermore, patients who have many physicians prescribing different medicines are more likely to have drug reactions. **Because older people are prescribed many medicines, this is a common problem in the elderly**. As people age, the rate of clearing drugs from the body decreases. Patients at higher risk for serious drug interactions include those with:

- Chronic medical conditions.
- Organ transplants.
- HIV.
- Hepatitis.

Some medicines have a low margin of error. This means there is little difference between too much medicine and enough medicine to do the job. Medicines that can fall into this category include:

- Warfarin.
- Digoxin.
- Lithium.
- Theophylline.
- MAO inhibitors.
- Seizure medicines.
- Cyclosporine.

Some medicines work against each other, others have an additive effect.

Drug interactions can be life threatening. There are things that you can do to help prevent possible drug interactions:

- **Have your care coordinated by one practitioner.** This care provider should be informed of all the **medicines and herbal supplements** you are taking even if prescribed by another practitioner.
- **Purchase all of your medicines through the same pharmacy.** They keep track of your medicines and possible drug interactions. They will notify your caregiver of potential problems.
- **Keep a list of all your medicines and their doses with you.** Do this so that your practitioner, emergency department caregiver or specialist will know what you are taking. This is very important before starting another medicine.
- **Keep a list of your on-going medical problems with you.** Medical problems such as kidney or liver problems, transplants, or chronic viral infections affect the way your body handles medicines.
- **Read the information given to you by the pharmacist**. Make sure to ask questions and report side effects to your caregiver or pharmacist.

By following these simple recommendations, you can minimize your chances of having a severe drug reaction, and it will also help your practitioner provide you with the best care possible. You can get reliable drug information at: www.drugs.com and www.drugdigest.org.

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