



Australian Prescriber



AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW

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MEDICATION MUDDLES A RISK FOR ELDERLY AUSTRALIANS

Up to 22% of emergency admissions of older people to hospital are related to their medicines, according to an editorial published in the latest issue of *Australian Prescriber*.

A survey at John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle, NSW found that 30% of older people were on six to ten types of medication and 13% were taking more than ten types of medication each day.

Approximately 40% of all prescriptions in Australia are written for people over the age of 65, even though only 12% of the population are over 65 years old.

Why are adverse drug reactions so frequent in older people? "Poor vision, poor hearing and arthritis of the hands make for difficulties in taking medicines as prescribed. Frailty is also associated with more adverse drug reactions," says Professor Nair, Director of Geriatric Medicine at John Hunter Hospital.

Yet up to 69% of adverse events are "predictable and preventable", according to Professor Nair. "With rapid increase in the population of very old people (more than 80 years old), adverse drug reactions are likely to increase."

The only way to prevent such an increase is through greater vigilance. "Communication between all [health] professionals is vital to improve our prescriptions and thereby patient outcomes," says Professor Nair.

In the International Year of Older Persons, the time is ripe to "review what we have been doing in the past and aim for the best available care for our seniors". Quality use of medicines will increase quality without reducing quantity of life.

Further information: Professor Nair phone (02) 4921 4832

The current issue of *Australian Prescriber* also looks at the new drug for the treatment of alcoholism and provides a fascinating history of the hypodermic needle.

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