

MEDIA RELEASE

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



UTAS research achieves dramatic drop in sedative use in nursing homes

Sedative use in Hobart nursing homes has decreased by almost half over two years as a result of UTAS research.

The findings have just been released as part of the School of Pharmacy's Reducing Use of Sedatives (RedUSE) intervention project, promoting improved use of benzodiazepines (sleeping and anxiety tablets) and antipsychotics in nursing homes.

The research found that during 2006, 43 per cent of Tasmanian nursing home residents were prescribed benzodiazepine medications - three times the reported rate in Sydney – and in 2009, the rate in Hobart had dropped to 27 per cent.

And the results will reach the international stage with Project manager, PhD student Juanita Westbury, presenting the research as part of a junior research prize at an international old age mental health conference in Montreal, Canada in September, resulting in guaranteed publication in an international journal on the psychiatry of old age.

Ms Westbury said the RedUSE project was inspired by an identified need to develop improved methods of sedative medication use in Tasmanian nursing homes.

“Residents often remain on these medications for extended periods and they can result in side effects such as falls and confusion,” Ms Westbury said.

“Another important result of the project was that doses of sedative medication were significantly more likely to be reviewed in nursing homes involved in the intervention. About 40 per cent of resident's antipsychotic and benzodiazepine doses were reduced or ceased in nursing homes participating in the intervention program.

“Overall, the RedUSE project has lowered the rate of sedative use significantly.”

The RedUSE intervention project involved community pharmacists, nursing staff and family doctors and ran for six months from August 2008 to February 2009. Nursing staff were provided two dedicated training sessions while doctors, pharmacists and staff regularly reviewed residents taking sedative medication.

The project was also supported by resident and relative information packages about sleeping tablets, and nursing home staff and pharmacists received regular newsletters.

“In the next 10 to 20 years, there will be a real problem with increasing mental health conditions in our ageing population, with many of these people ending up in nursing homes.” Ms Westbury said,

“This is the first research project to develop and test strategies to reduce sedative use in Australian nursing homes through a coordinated package involving nursing staff, pharmacists, relatives and doctors.

“The strategies were effective and well accepted by health professionals and should be adopted in all nursing homes in Australia.”

The RedUSE project has been funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing as part of the Fourth Community Pharmacy Agreement through the Fourth Community Pharmacy Agreement Grants program, managed by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia.

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