

Helping Seniors Prevent Overmedication

(NAPSA)—New research indicates that the number of senior citizens subjected to potentially dangerous overmedication has more than doubled since 1999.

The research, released by pharmacy benefit manager Medco Health Solutions, Inc. in conjunction with its 2003 Drug Trend Report, reviewed the prescriptions of 6.3 million seniors and found approximately 7.9 million issues of concern with these prescriptions, including inappropriate medications, excessive dosages and drug interactions. Some experts say this may be only the tip of the iceberg. Millions of seniors who have either no insurance or are covered by Medicare may not have all of their prescriptions reviewed for these types of issues every time they get a prescription filled.

“Not every problem we found was cause for alarm,” said Dr. Glen Stettin, vice president, clinical products, Medco Health, “but the research does indicate a need for better communication among doctors, pharmacists and patients.”

According to the research, one in four seniors sees four or more different physicians, and one senior in three used four or more different pharmacies to fill prescriptions last year.

“Seniors and their caregivers must take an active role in managing their medications, and work with their various doctors and pharmacists to avoid these medication mistakes,” said Dr. Stettin. “Whether it’s prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, or supplements, it’s important that seniors be aware of the interactions they could face as a result of taking many different medications.”

Seniors can avoid medication mistakes with a few simple tips:

Make a Medication List: Keep an updated list of all the medications you are taking, including over-the-counter drugs, and bring it to every doctor’s



Simple steps can help you save time, trouble and perhaps your life.

appointment. Share the list with family members and post it at home so emergency workers can easily find it.

Seniors should also ask questions of their doctor including:

How does this medication benefit me? Always know what you are taking a medication for, and what benefits you hope to achieve from it, so you can help your doctors monitor whether the medication is working.

Are there side effects and how do I recognize them? By understanding how the medication will react in your body, you can more quickly recognize adverse reactions.

Is this the right dosage for me? As you age, you may need a lower dose of a medication, even if you have been on the medication for some time.

Are you communicating with other doctors? Request that any specialist you see send a full report, including drugs prescribed, to your primary care doctor after your appointment.

Can we eliminate some of these meds? It’s always a good idea to request that your doctor regularly review all of your medications with you to see if you still need them all.