



Medication Error Reporting and Prevention Council Issues Recommendations for Improving Medication Safety by Reducing Inappropriate Polypharmacy

Rockville, Md., March 30, 2021 — The National Coordinating Council for Medication Error Reporting and Prevention (NCC MERP/The Council) has released, “*Recommendations for Improving Medication Safety by Reducing Inappropriate Polypharmacy*,” that addresses steps to minimize the risk of patient harm from inappropriate polypharmacy.

As summarized by the Council, the term “polypharmacy” most commonly refers to a situation where a patient is being treated with many – five or more – medications. Patients of all ages may potentially receive many medications. The incidences of inappropriate polypharmacy are on the rise in part to a population subset seeing more doctors (primary care and specialists) and an increase in chronic diseases.

The consequences of inappropriate polypharmacy are more common and often more severe in the elderly, as they are more likely to have a number of chronic conditions. Physiological changes (e.g. changes in organ function, drug metabolism and excretion), in particular those that are age-related, also impact how drugs affect patients and can place them at higher risk of experiencing harm, particularly in the case of those receiving inappropriate polypharmacy.

However, there are a number of challenges that need to be addressed including poor communication among clinicians about the intent of the medication and/or when to discontinue or adjust doses; lack of awareness by the healthcare provider of the patient’s current and complete medication regimen, including prescription medications, over-the-counter products, dietary supplements and minerals; lack of awareness that the patient may independently be seeking medications to relieve symptoms or cure a disease; and use of a medication to ameliorate the symptoms caused by another medication which may not be needed.

Encompassed in the statement are recommendations from the Council for providers, patients, and patient family members on how to reduce patient harm and medication errors associated with inappropriate polypharmacy. This includes utilizing standard tools and engagement of patients and family members to optimize medication safety.

For a copy of the article “Recommendations for Improving Medication Safety by Reducing Inappropriate Polypharmacy” please visit the NCC MERP website at <https://www.nccmerp.org/press-releases>.