

## Medication and Dietary Supplement Education Drives Informed Choices

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Because elderly patients are on an average of 5 prescription and 2 over-the-counter medications, it is not surprising that their risk for adverse effects is significantly higher than for younger patients. Many clinicians note that the use of pharmacologic agents in the elderly is one of the most difficult aspects of patient care. Most elderly patients are responsible for managing their own medications and must make choices based upon their assessment of the risk and benefit of each item. Yet the elderly consumer is bombarded with information about prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, dietary supplements and herbal products from multiple media sources, friends and family members. This information may not be based on evidence and may lead the elderly patient to make choices that are less than optimal.

We propose to conduct an exploratory study to understand consumers' perceptions of prescription benefit designs and pharmaceutical policy issues. We then plan to develop an educational program to provide elderly consumers with evidence-based medication information so that the elderly patient can make informed choices about medication use. The program will include information on selecting good sources of drug information and a discussion of strategies for patients to use which will help them make informed choices in their medication

management decisions. The program will be unique in that it is focused on consumers and, more specifically, on elderly consumers who are the largest consumers of prescription medication.

This program will be piloted at the Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging in Little Rock and at 1 of the Rural Centers on Aging (locations include Pine Bluff, El Dorado, Texarkana, Fort Smith, Springdale, Mountain Home, Jonesboro, West Memphis) so that we can learn what works and what doesn't work in this group of consumers. Future goals will be to make the program available for pharmacists to provide throughout the state, thus increasing the prescription literacy of elderly Arkansans.

Dr. Donna West, former UAMS COP Faculty member now on Faculty at the University of Mississippi, is available to provide consultation on developing the proposal.