

July 2019

Hot Tip: Polypharmacy

What is polypharmacy?

Polypharmacy has many definitions including concurrent use of multiple medications (usually five or more), unnecessary drug use and medication use without indication.

What are the causes of polypharmacy?

Polypharmacy is caused by multiple prescribers, multiple comorbid conditions, multiple pharmacies and self-treatment with over-the-counter medications and supplements.

What are the consequences of polypharmacy?

At a patient level, polypharmacy can lead to an increase in adverse drug events and drug interactions; medication nonadherence; geriatric syndromes including delirium, falls and urinary incontinence; and a general decrease in functional status. At a business level, polypharmacy results in increased health care costs.

How can the PCP help?

The PCP has a unique opportunity to lead care for the patient, including the deprescribing process when provided a listing of all medications being filled for his or her patient. The CDC defines deprescribing as the “systematic process of identifying and discontinuing drugs in instances in which existing or potential harms outweigh existing or potential benefits within the context of an individual patient’s care goals, current level of functioning, life expectancy, values and preferences.” It is “a positive, patient-centered intervention that involves inherent uncertainties and requires shared decision making, informed patient consent and close monitoring of effects.” (*Scott, IA et al. JAMA Intern Med. 2015; 175(5):827-834*)

If you have any questions regarding this topic, please call Provider Services at **1-844-405-4296**.