

October 27, 2009

To Virginia's Seniors, Their Families, and Caregivers:

October is Talk About Prescription month, and I am asking you to do just that. Remember when your mom said "don't talk back to me". Well, I am asking you to **TALK BACK** about prescriptions to your doctor, your pharmacist and other health providers involved in your medication program. Better communication with them is an important step to ensure safe and appropriate medication use.

I was a practicing geriatrician for 39 years and learned to respect the importance of proper medication use to the health and quality of my patients' lives. Now retired, I travel around the country lecturing to seniors about the value of modifying their lifestyle to include daily exercise, better nutrition, weight control, and smoking cessation, all of which contribute to better health. In addition, I have added a discussion about proper medication use stressing the critically important role it plays in achieving better health and quality of life for seniors. I know first-hand the importance of medication management and I was so pleased to hear that SeniorNavigator, through grant funding from the Attorney General of Virginia and Owens & Minor, has focused on shedding light on this important, yet often overlooked topic.

It is no surprise that adults 65 and older consume more prescription medications than any other age group, however, medications are a two edged sword. On the one hand, they are often the key to symptom control and improved health, and on the other, improper use either accidental or unintended can and often does lead to serious side effects, a worsening of symptoms, addiction and even death.

Seniors often have more than one chronic illness requiring the taking of multiple medications at the same time. As older adults we often see more than one physician each of whom may add to our medication program. These medications may interact and cause a reaction, symptoms, and a worsening of our overall health and quality of life. So, if you are being cared for by more than one provider it is even more important to **TALK BACK** about your prescriptions when you visit each of them. Another problem that may cause a worsening of symptoms is one caused by a lack of money to purchase the prescribed medication. This may result in an interruption of treatment and with some medication result in withdrawal symptoms. Ask about assistance in obtaining medications if cost is the underlying issue.

Because of the chronic nature of our illnesses medications use may be necessary for long periods of time, years in fact. Chronic use may lead dependence and abuse. Recent government estimates say that the number of older adults with substance abuse problems

will be doubled from 2.5 million in 1999 to 5 million by 2020. **TALK BACK** about your prescriptions to your doctor and ask how long you should continue to take a medication.

What can one do to help?

- **TALK BACK** about prescriptions to your doctor and ask about what the name of the medication is and why you are taking it. Tell him/her of any allergies you have.
- How should it be taken?
- How will I know its working?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- Are there side effects I should know about? If you have just begun a new medication and experience new or unusual symptoms call your doctor and discuss the situation with him/her
- Can I safely take this medication with the others I am already receiving? This should include any herbal and over the counter remedies? Can I drink alcohol?
- Check the label and review the written material that comes with the prescriptions and **TALK BACK** about prescriptions to the Pharmacist with your questions before you leave the drug store.
  - Keep an up to date list of all your medications by your phone and carry one with you at all times especially to all of your doctor appointments. Be sure the list includes herbal and over the counter remedies you use. Interactions with herbal and natural remedies and prescription drugs may lead to serious side effect such as excessive bleeding.

All of this is a way saying **HAPPY BACK TALKING** with all your providers about your prescriptions. Even though your mom said don't talk back, in this case if you do, it will lead to better health and better quality of life for you. Both your mom and mine will understand. So, join the **BACKTALK** movement.

Wishing you good health,

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