

Highlights of the Human Rights Watch Report “They Want Docile”

Human Rights Watch's (HRW) [report on the continued misuse of antipsychotic drugs](#) on nursing home residents presents a blistering analysis of a human rights crisis obscured by a feeble national campaign that uses a flawed measure to determine success.

Tolerating Misuse. The report discusses the six year-old National Campaign to Reduce Antipsychotic Misuse in Nursing Homes, which has led to some reductions in antipsychotic use. Yet despite the significant effort of many people involved in the Campaign, HRW concludes there are still 179,000 nursing home residents who are being inappropriately drugged every day in violation of international human rights standards. The Campaign has not meant much to these residents.

Doubting the Data. HRW noted the troubling increase in dubious schizophrenia diagnoses in nursing homes. The increase is because antipsychotic use for residents with schizophrenia is not "counted" in the federal antipsychotic quality measure. Long-term care [providers themselves have noted](#) this troubling increase [as has CANHR](#).

No Harm, Really?! HRW's statistical analysis found that 97% of all federal deficiencies issued for inappropriate drugging were found to have caused "no harm" to the resident-victims and were thus considered minimal infractions. This finding of weak enforcement is consistent with the [conclusions of an earlier report](#) on CMS's non-effort regarding antipsychotic misuse. When nursing homes that inappropriately drug residents are given only minimal punishment for breaking the rules, those rules are going to have little utility.

Wasted Effort. Data analysis showed that nursing homes that had been cited for violating federal rules against misuse of antipsychotics had no statistically meaningful reduction in antipsychotic use compared to facilities with no violations. In other words, the use of antipsychotics was unaffected by enforcement efforts, largely because the enforcement efforts are so weak and transitory.

Bogus Informed Consent. As highlighted by the report, antipsychotics for people with dementia are very risky and often lethal and they do not resolve the underlying unmet need at issue. So why would anyone agree to take them? The answer is few residents or their representatives are ever really told about risks or alternatives to drugs. The report explains that antipsychotics are often only referred to in passing and their use presented in a flattering way so they seem benign, helpful, and needed.

Real Human Suffering. The HRW report focuses on the human impact of inappropriate drugging, including the social isolation and lack of meaningful engagement with the world that results from oversedation. There is discussion about the deterioration of family relationships wrought by the inability of family members to interact with residents who are drugged and sleep all day. The most powerful testimony about the horrible psychosocial harm caused by overdrugging comes from the residents themselves.

SPECIAL REPORT BY:

California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform

650 Harrison Street, 2nd Floor San Francisco, CA 94107

(415) 974-5171 or (800) 474-1116 (Consumers Only)

www.canhr.org

