Impact of Opioids on Incontinence

For nursing homes, it’s important to know the impact that specific quality measures can have on overall composite scores. For example, **incontinence is the leading quality measure** driving composite scores up in Kentucky nursing homes, with 50 percent of residents being incontinent.

Incontinence has many negative effects on a resident. A few of those effects are listed below.

1. Interfering with activities;
2. Embarrassing the resident;
3. Increasing feelings of dependency;
4. Increasing risk of long-term institutionalization;
5. Increasing risk of skin breakdown/rashes;
6. Increasing risk of urinary tract infection and
7. Increasing risk of falls/injuries.

In addressing incontinence, consider factors such as listed below.

1. Mobility issues,
2. Change in environment,
3. Recent surgery and
4. **Effect of medications.**

Knowing the effect of medications on incontinence is crucial. Opioids have been identified as a high-risk medication class that has the most significant impact on incontinence in nursing homes. Opioids can cause sedation or drowsiness and relaxation of the bladder, which causes urinary retention. The resident may show symptoms of a lack of desire to use the toilet, difficulty in starting the urinary stream, straining to void, voiding with a weak stream and leaking between urination.

**atom Alliance** is currently conducting a pilot study with a small group of nursing homes that had poor incontinence quality measure scores. The atom Alliance team assists nursing homes in identifying residents on Casper reports that trigger for incontinence who are also taking opioids and confirming those residents are appropriately coded. Pilot nursing homes are striving to decrease inappropriate use of opioids by investigating best practices for identification of specific sources for resident’s pain and accurately documenting the resident’s pain to determine best treatments. Those best treatments often do not require pain medication, specifically opioids.

The pilot project is concentrated on providing education and resources for the following.

1. **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC) guidelines for opioid use
2. Appropriate indications for opioid use
3. How to communicate with patients/families about opioids
4. Incontinence/Types of Incontinence
5. How opioids impact incontinence

The pilot project advocates making sure every resident on an opioid has a specific, appropriate indication for use (identify residents, identify indication, work with the medication safety team to ensure indication is appropriate, or taper the resident’s opioid use). The nursing home staff are conducting a deeper
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assessment and documenting more specific sources for the resident’s pain. This in turn provides the information necessary for physicians and pharmacists to determine the best medication that is the least risky and harmful. Early data is demonstrating that improved assessment and documentation may be decreasing the percentage of opioids used. atom Alliance is monitoring the outcomes of the pilot project and will share the final results.

How do I Learn Additional Information about the Pilot Project?
Please reach out to atom Alliance to learn the details of the pilot project. atom Alliance is also a great resource for best practices on improving overall composite scores. For more guidance, contact the atom Alliance Quality Improvement Advisor for Kentucky, Scott Gibson at scott.gibson@area-G.hcqs.org or by phone at 502-680-2669. All our services are free, and we offer many educational tools to assist.

More on atom Alliance
Formed as a partnership between three leading healthcare consultancies, atom Alliance is working under contract to CMS throughout Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee to improve quality and achieve better outcomes in health and healthcare and at lower costs for the patients and communities. Through atom Alliance, AQAF in Alabama, IQH in Mississippi and Qsource in Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee are carrying out an exciting strategic plan, with programs in place to convene, teach and inform healthcare providers, engage and empower patients, and inspire, share knowledge and spread best practices with communities across the entire healthcare continuum. Learn more at www.atomAlliance.org.

This has been an active flu season! As always, please encourage your residents and staff to protect themselves and obtain tetanus, pneumococcal, and influenza vaccines!

References and sources: