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## AgeOptions, University of Illinois College of Pharmacy Partner on Medication Safety for Older Adults

The inability of some older adults to self-manage their medications is one of the most common reasons for nursing home placement. To lessen that possibility, AgeOptions and the University of Illinois College of Pharmacy have partnered for 15 years to reduce the risk of medication related problems through workshops that include individualized medication reviews, medication action planning, and educational materials targeting strategies for managing medications to encourage safe medication practices.

“The older adult population is inherently at highest risk of medication misadventures,” said Mike Koronkowski, PharmD, clinical assistant professor at the College of Pharmacy and co-coordinator of the Medication Monitoring and Safety in Older Adults program.



*Participants at "brown bag" events bring their medications for review.*



*Mike Koronkowski, PharmD*

That risk includes too much medication and potentially dangerous combinations of medications, which can occur when drugs are prescribed by several different doctors and/or filled by different pharmacies. Other risk factors include not understanding how to take medications appropriately, how to monitor for drug interactions and adverse effects, and how to interact with doctors to ask relevant questions.

With support from AgeOptions, College of Pharmacy clinical faculty, pharmacy residents and students have screened approximately 8,000 older adults in 350 Medication Safety programs since 2001. The screenings have taken place in 18 suburban Cook County ZIP codes in seven languages in addition to English: Spanish, Korean, Gujarati, Hindi, Polish, Russian and Mandarin.

Screenings include “brown bag” comprehensive medication reviews, with participants encouraged to bring all their medications for evaluation. Faculty members and volunteer pharmacy students evaluate the drugs, looking for possible interactions, side effects, expired medications and other risks. They also provide information on safe medication use and address the importance of vaccinations for older adults in preventing illnesses.

Approximately half the seniors screened were identified as



*Pharmacy students and faculty review prescriptions for possible interactions and other risks.*

being at “high risk” for medication-related problems and immunization-related gaps. These individuals were provided a personalized medication safety “report card” that they were encouraged to use as a guide for discussion when they visit their health care provider.

“The program made me realize medications can cause many problems, especially if not used appropriately,” one participant said in a survey. Other participants said the medication reviews and information: “Helped me understand the importance of asking questions about my medications and having my medications reviewed on an ongoing basis,” “Made me feel in more control of my medications,” and “Made me more aware of the dangers of polypharmacy and drug interactions.”

In 2015-2016, 250 older adults were screened in 10 Medication Safety programs in suburban Cook County. According to Koronkowski, that program focused on self-screening using a



*The 2015-2016 program focused on high risk medications.*

Medication Screen Checklist, and targeted high risk medications using the nationally recognized 2015 Beer’s Criteria tool to screen for potentially inappropriate prescribing. The tool is designed to educate consumers on high risk medications and strategies for managing complex drug regimens safely.

In addition to screening older adults, the AgeOptions/College of Pharmacy partnership this year provided an interprofessional program for nursing, medical, occupational therapy and pharmacy students in which students and seniors took part in a roundtable discussion on



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issues confronting community-based senior centers and how professional students can get involved with Area Agencies on Aging.

“We are very grateful for the opportunity to partner with the College of Pharmacy to help older adults successfully manage their medications and avoid potentially serious health effects,” said Kim McCahill, AgeOptions director of Planning, Grants and Program Development. “AgeOptions is currently seeking private sources of support to continue the program.”

For more information about the program and AgeOptions support, please contact Paula Bartolozzi or Chrystal Brown at AgeOptions, (708)383-0258.

The College of Pharmacy continues its commitment to community-based senior outreach around medication safety, providing more than 200 programs a year through various partnerships and targeted efforts, Koronkowski said. As part of the federally funded Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program, ENGAGE-IL, the College plans to continue to expand dissemination of evidence-based consumer self-management initiatives for older adults, and to develop consumer-based point-of-care products to assist dementia caregivers.