

Preventable Mistakes in Nursing Homes

Any time a person is prescribed one or more drugs, there is a danger that the patient will suffer what is called an adverse drug event, that is, some injury resulting from the use of the drug. However, according to a study published in the *American Journal of Medicine*, nursing home residents are especially susceptible to adverse drug events, and they suffer almost 2 million such events each year, about 86,000 of which are life-threatening. Most disturbingly, the authors of the study estimate that 70% of these adverse drug events are preventable.

There are a number of reasons for the high number of adverse drug events in nursing homes. Residents of nursing homes are often on multiple medications, increasing the chance of one drug interacting with another in an unexpected or dangerous way. Doctors sometimes make errors in prescribing drugs for a patient, or the patient may not be properly monitored by the nursing home staff to make sure that a prescribed drug is not causing adverse side effects. And, there is always the chance that a mistake will be made in actually administering the drug—giving the patient the wrong pill or giving the patient the correct pill in the wrong way or at the wrong time. Any of these mistakes can lead to an adverse drug event.

Given that most nursing home patients and their families are not doctors or pharmacists, it can be difficult to prevent adverse drug events. However, you can make sure that a loved one who lives in a nursing home is treated by a competent doctor, and you can ask what rules are in place to prevent mistakes in dispensing drugs and to help people who suffer an adverse drug event.