

## **Overview**

### **Medication Management and Polypharmacy**

Medications play an important role in the cure, palliation, and prevention of disease. Although medications provide benefit, they also expose patients to drug-related problems. Geriatric individuals are frequent consumers of medications due to the high prevalence of chronic disease. The elderly may be at particular risk for drug-related problems due to physiologic changes that occur with aging, multiple concomitant diseases, and a loss of homeostatic reserve.<sup>1</sup>

Drug-related problems can be defined as "an undesirable patient experience that involves drug therapy and that actually or potentially interferes with a desired patient outcome." Drug-related problems may include under-prescribing, improper drug selection, over dosage, adverse drug reactions, drug interactions, and drug use without indication.<sup>2</sup> Undesired patient outcomes in the elderly may include hospitalization, falls, functional decline, and changes in cognition.

Pharmacotherapy is among the most powerful interventions to improve health outcomes in the elderly. However, since some medications are less appropriate for older patients, system approaches to improving pharmacy care may be an effective way to reduce inappropriate medication use.

The following Medication Management and Polypharmacy Best Practices focus on:

- Defining Polypharmacy and understanding the contributing factors and how to manage those factors
- Medication management through
  - ↳ Communication
  - ↳ Documentation
  - ↳ Guidelines for medication review
  - ↳ Beer's List

#### **References:**

1. Owens NJ, Fretwell MD, Willey C et al. Distinguishing between the fit and frail elderly, and optimizing pharmacotherapy. *Drugs & Aging* 1994;4:47-55.
2. Strand LM, Morley PC, Cipolle RJ et al. Drug-related problems: their structure and function. *DICP Ann Pharmacother* 1990;24:1093-7.