

# Dementia Antipsychotic Guide for Care Providers

## General Guidelines:

- 1. Look for reversible causes** of challenging behaviors or other target symptoms prior to asking for a drug to treat them. Examples include medical problems, drugs, modifiable stressors.
- 2. Try non-drug strategies first.** Keep using these strategies even if anti-psychotics are used.
- 3. Clearly document treatment targets** (symptoms) before and after a strategy or drug is tried. Include frequency, severity, time of day, and environmental or other triggers of symptoms.
- 4. Use of an antipsychotic should be well-justified.** The treatment target symptom must present a **danger to the person or others**, or cause the person to have one of the following:
  - inconsolable or persistent distress
  - a major decline in function
  - substantial difficulty receiving needed careAppropriate and inappropriate treatment targets from CMS are listed in the boxes below. Generally antipsychotics should not be used for inappropriate treatment targets.
- 5. Monitor for effectiveness and side effects.** (see other side)
- 6. If the drug doesn't help, it should be stopped.**

## Appropriate Antipsychotic Treatment Targets:

- **Aggressive behavior** (especially physical)
- **Hallucinations:** seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or feeling things that seem real to the person but not others. For example, hearing voices or seeing people who aren't there.
- **Delusions:** false personal beliefs that a person has in spite of evidence they aren't true. For example, thinks husband or wife is having an affair without reason, or family members are imposters.  
Note: memory problems are sometimes mistaken for delusions, e.g. thinks people are stealing items that were misplaced and forgotten.
- **Other severe distress** as described above in #4 General Guidelines

## Inappropriate Antipsychotic Treatment Targets:

- Wandering
- Not being social or friendly
- Poor self-care
- Restlessness
- Uncooperativeness without aggressive behavior
- Not caring about what is going on around them
- Speech or behaviors that are not dangerous to the person or others
- Nervousness
- Fidgeting
- Mild anxiety
- Impaired memory