

"To promote the health and well-being of all Californians with developmental disabilities."

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SUMMER

# Wellness Digest

Volume I, Number 2

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

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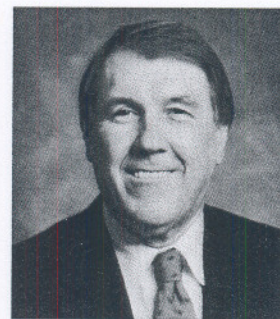
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The **Wellness Initiative** is barely one year old but I am so pleased at the progress we have made as a community . Our commitment to individuals with developmental disabilities brings together the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), regional centers, developmental centers, the community and the health care professions in partnerships that focus on the health and wellness needs of those individuals.

Some of the accomplishments during this first year of the **Wellness Initiative** include the following:

- In fiscal year 1996/97, \$1.6 million was allocated for regional projects relating to wellness. This includes projects for health assessments, medication reviews, telemedicine, physician education, dental health, and consumer/family education.
- An additional \$1.0 million has been appropriated for wellness through the fiscal year 1997/98 Budget Act.
- The State Council on Developmental Disabilities distributed more than \$800,000 of Program Development Funds (PDF) to projects related to health and wellness.
- \$6.1 million was included in the 1997/98 state budget to fund clinical teams at each regional center.
- The University of the Pacific School of Dentistry and the Department of Health Services Denti-Cal program, have agreed to provide technical assistance to DDS.
- The Association of Regional Center Agencies and the Association of County Mental Health Directors developed guidelines for collaboration between local mental health programs and regional centers.
- The Psychologist Internship Program established 13 internships in developmental centers.
- DDS negotiated a process for resolving Medi-Cal managed care problems with the Department of Health Services.
- And, let's not forget the Wellness Digest was established to share information on health and wellness topics and issues with professionals, consumers, family members, caregivers, and others.



Dennis G. Amundson, Director

There are many other wellness issues being addressed through the **Wellness Initiative** and the efforts of individual regional center and developmental center projects. I'll keep you updated in future issues of the Wellness Digest.

*Dennis G. Amundson*

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## PUBLICATION NAME CHANGE

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You will notice a new name for our publication with this issue. Our apologies to the publisher of the University of California at Berkeley Wellness Letter who called to our attention the similarity of their copyrighted publication name.

## TRAINING AVAILABLE

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Medication Administration and Medication Management Course for Care Providers of Developmental Disabled Individuals. BRN, CNA credits available.

Contact: Clair Lear, RN, BSN  
(209) 339-7508  
Health Education Specialist  
Lodi Memorial Hospital

## MORE DENTAL RESOURCES

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Cedars-Sinai Medical Center provides dental treatment to persons with developmental and other disabilities.

Contact: Irving Lebovics, DDS, Director; Cedars-Sinai Medical Center  
Ambulatory Care Center, Suite 1316  
8700 Beverly Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90048  
Tel: 310-855-6361 Fax: 310-289-8053

Loma Linda University School of Dentistry Surgery Center serves persons with developmental disabilities and those who are medically compromised. This licensed and accredited out-patient facility is the largest of its kind, and has access to all dental specialties. Any person who needs to be treated in a hospital setting can be seen in the Loma Linda University Medical Center, adjacent to the Surgery Center for Dentistry. The typical patient is treated by a dentist, an anesthesiologist, and staff nurses. Dental and medical emergency coverage is available at all times.

Medi-Cal/DentiCal is accepted by the LLU Surgery Center for Dentistry. Appointments can be made by calling (909) 824-4663.

## SPECIAL SMILES: A GUIDE TO GOOD ORAL HEALTH FOR PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Our shipment of these booklets has arrived. If you already put in an order, you should have your copies. If you haven't ordered, you're missing out on an excellent booklet on dental care for consumers, parents and other direct care givers. We have a limited supply, so don't delay. Send a written request to the Wellness Digest editor, leave a message at (916) 654-1722, or e-mail your request to: [ddshq1.aslss@cahwnet.gov](mailto:ddshq1.aslss@cahwnet.gov).

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**T**his issue contains helpful tips for safely administering medications and caring for the individuals who use those medications. However, it is important to remember that **this is meant for general information and does not cover all possible medical situations, precautions, drug interactions or adverse reactions. This information is not intended as medical advice. If you have questions about medical conditions or medications, check with your physician, pharmacist, or other appropriate health care professional.**

The intent of a medication is to cause some reaction within the body. Ideally, that reaction would be exactly what is needed to heal, prevent, or lessen the effects of accident, disease, or disability. However, there is often additional reaction beyond the condition for which the medication was prescribed. These reactions vary widely depending on the medication itself, other medications and/or over-the-counter (OTC) medications taken, and each individual's body chemistry. Our reaction to medication may also be affected by other chemicals we add to our bodies, including caffeine, tobacco smoke, alcohol, the food we eat and lotions applied to our skin.

Persons with disabilities often have chronic health conditions that affect their response to drugs. Some of these health conditions include:

- Immobility—oral medications may stay in the stomach or intestine longer than usual.*
- Kidney or liver damage—interferes with the metabolism of proteins, carbohydrates, fats, and medications.*
- Swallowing deficiency—may result in less nutrients and fluids in the body, and cause a problem with the absorption and excretion of drugs.*

- Multiple health conditions—may mean an individual is taking more than one drug which can result in adverse reactions.*
- Seizures—some behavior inhibiting drugs can cause more seizures in a person who already has them.*
- Respiratory problems—drugs or treatment used can interfere with swallowing and keeping food in the stomach.*
- Seizures and poor muscle tone—drugs commonly given for these conditions may cause gastro-esophageal reflux (heartburn) and difficulty in swallowing.*

## WHAT TO TELL THE DOCTOR BEFORE MEDICATIONS ARE PRESCRIBED

It's important for the doctor to know about anything that may affect his or her choice in what medications to prescribe. Often, the doctor isn't told things that seem unimportant, and you find out later they were very important. As you read further about interactions of medications, you will see how important it is to tell the doctor everything—no matter how big or small! Here is a partial list of things the doctor should know before prescribing medications.

- All prescribed medications you are now taking or stopped taking recently. It's best to always have a list of the medication names, the amount to be taken, the directions for taking the medication, and the reason it was prescribed.*
- All over-the-counter (OTC) medications used, even if only used occasionally. This includes aspirin and other pain relievers, cold and allergy medications, etc.*
- Any prescribed or OTC medications that you are allergic to or that have caused a bad reaction.*

**MEDICATION**



- If you use street drugs, like marijuana, crack, crank, downers, etc., even if only occasionally.*
- If you have asthma or other breathing problems.*
- If you drink any alcohol.*
- If you smoke.*
- If you have any surgery, including dental, planned.*
- If you are or might be pregnant.*
- If you are planning or trying to get pregnant.*
- If you are nursing a baby.*

## **WHAT TO ASK THE DOCTOR/ PHARMACIST ABOUT MEDICATIONS**

It's just as important to ask the doctor questions about a prescription so that possible side effects can be minimized. The following are some suggestions:

- What is the name of the medication?*
- How and when do I take this medication and for how long? Does it have to be taken until it is all gone?*
- What is the medication supposed to do?*
- How long before I might notice that it is working (or not working)?*
- Are there any foods or drinks that I should avoid while taking the medication?*
- Are there any activities that I should avoid while taking the medication?*
- Does smoking or drinking alcohol affect this medication?*
- Does the medication make the skin more sensitive to sunlight or to sunburn?*
- Can the medication affect the body temperature or make me more (or less) sensitive to hot or cold?*
- If the directions say "Take with food," does that mean to take with a full meal, a light snack, or is taking it with a glass of milk or juice okay?*
- What are common side effects?*
- If I have any side effects, what should I do? How do I know whether to go to emergency, call you right away or just make an appointment?*
- If I miss a dose, what should I do? How can I make it up?*
- Is this medication addictive? What precautions should be taken?*
- Does the medication affect any birth control being used?*
- If it is being prescribed for a long period of time, are there any long term effects?*

If you think of something later that you forgot to ask, don't be shy about calling the doctor or pharmacist to ask. It's important to understand the medication and directions.

## **UNDERSTANDING PRESCRIPTION LABELS**

California law requires that certain information be included on all prescription labels. The location of the information on the label is not specified in law as long as it includes all of the following information:

- ☐ Name and address of the pharmacy/pharmacist who fills the prescription.
- ☐ Prescription number or other means of identifying the prescription.
- ☐ It is important to use this number when requesting refills because it refers to a specific prescription, dose and use of a medication.
- ☐ Name of the medication.
- ☐ Strength.
- ☐ Directions for how to use the medication.
- ☐ Patient's name.
- ☐ Manufacturer.
- ☐ Name of person who prescribed the medication.
- ☐ Quantity—the number of pills, or other measurement of the amount of the prescription.
- ☐ Date the prescription was filled.

Most pharmacies also include an expiration or discard date and the number of refills remaining. If you ask your doctor to include the condition for which the drug was prescribed on the prescription form, the pharmacy will also include that on your prescription label if you ask them to do that. A pharmacist can also answer questions contained in the previous "What to Ask Your Doctor" section.

Pharmacists are required to include a label or enclosure and give the patient an oral consultation on any medication that has a new dosage, form, or strength, or that has never been used previously by the patient. The oral consultation must include the directions for use and storage, the importance of following the directions, and cautions and warnings of potential side-effects that may occur. **If you don't receive this counseling, ask for it!**

## HOW IMPORTANT IS THE DRUG INFORMATION SHEET?

What is a drug information sheet? It's a paper (in print about this size!) that is included with the first filled prescription for a medication and any time the instructions or the dosage is changed by the doctor. There is usually a separate sheet for patients and another for health professionals.

The patient information sheet usually has the following information:

- Reason(s) why the drug is used.
- How to take the drug.
- Warnings or precautions about the use of the drug. Possible interactions with other drugs, side effects, what to watch for, when to call the doctor, etc.
- Any other information that the drug manufacturer thinks is important to know about the drug.
- Information on how to store the drug.
- Reasons(s) for which the drug should not be used are sometimes included.

So, what do you do with the insert? **Read it!** Be sure all caregivers become familiar with the warnings and possible side effects. Let all caregivers know where the insert is kept and keep it readily available in case questions arise later.

## HALF-LIFE—WHAT IS IT?

Half-life is the time required for half (50%) of the quantity of a drug or other substance to be metabolized or eliminated by normal biological processes. The half-life of a drug is used to determine how much time is needed to have a consistent level of the drug in the blood to cause the desired effect. In order to reach a steady state or consistency in the amount of the drug in the bloodstream, the amount of the drug taken in must be equal to the amount of drug excreted by the body. It may take 5 or more doses to reach that goal.

For example, it is important to have a consistent amount of an anti-seizure drug in the blood stream at all times in order to help control the seizures. If the concentration of the drug in the blood stream drops because the drug is not given on schedule or there is other interference with metabolism, seizures will likely result. If the concentration increases for any reason, it could result in drug toxicity with resulting adverse effects.

A drug with a long half-life may take longer to reach the level of consistency needed because the doses are usually given further apart. For example, a drug with a 24-hour half-life may be given only once a day. It could take up to five or more days to see the appropriate effect of the drug. A drug with a short half-life that is given 4 times a day may show effects within a day or two. When a drug is discontinued, the half-life is an indication of how long it will take for the body to eliminate all of the drug.

### Here's a test!

**Q:** Why is half-life important?

**A:** Half-life is used to determine how much time is needed to have a consistent level of the drug in the system. If the level of drug does not stay consistent, the drug will not work like it is supposed to work.

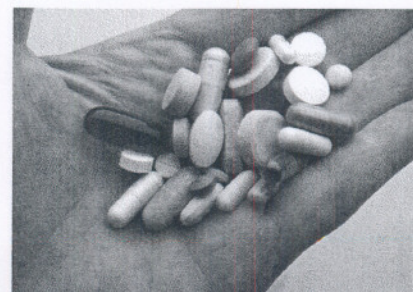
**Q:** If the directions for taking a drug are to take it every 8 hours, does that mean to take it at breakfast, lunch and before bedtime?

**A:** NO—unless breakfast, lunch and bedtime are exactly 8 hours apart, which is not usually the case. However, you might want to plan the time for the first administration of the drug (with permission of the physician) so the person can get as many hours of uninterrupted sleep time as possible.

**Q:** So what is most important to remember about medications and half-life?

**A:** What is most important to remember is:

- ✓ Take medications in the proper dose.
- ✓ Take them at the time intervals given in the instructions.
- ✓ Order prescription refills at least a week in advance so you do not run out of the medication.
- ✓ Check the prescription refill to be sure the prescription number, medication name, dose and time intervals are the same as the prescription being used. If they are not, contact the doctor or pharmacist.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The following information includes a partial listing of some interactions of drugs. **In order to be fully informed about drug interactions, it is important to consult the doctor, pharmacist and the drug information sheet.**

## ANTIPSYCHOTIC MEDICATIONS

Some common adverse reactions are: dry mouth, irregular heart beat, constipation, urinary retention, extreme sensitivity to the sun, dehydration and the loss of electrolytes, numbing of the pain threshold and blurry vision.

## ASPIRIN (ACETYLSALICYLIC ACID)

Antacids can speed the excretion of aspirin causing a decrease in pain relief.

Aspirin decreases the rate of excretion of gout medication causing an increased level of gout medications in the body.

Codeine and aspirin together increase pain relief more than either drug alone.

Aspirin can interfere with blood concentrations of insulin, oral antidiabetics and some anticonvulsants.

## COUMADIN (WARFARIN)

Avoid large helpings of broccoli, asparagus, brussels sprouts and other foods high in vitamin K. Normal 1/2 cup servings are acceptable. Large amounts of these foods counteract the effect of the blood thinner.

## DIARRHEA COMPOUNDS

Slows movement of the GI tract and slows absorption of medications requiring absorption through the intestine. Check the drug information sheet or ask the pharmacist if your medication is meant to be absorbed through the intestine.

## FOOD

A heavy meal slows movement of the GI tract and slows absorption of medications that are absorbed through the intestine. Check the drug information sheet or ask the pharmacist if your medication is meant to be absorbed through the intestine.

## LANOXIN (DIGOXIN)

Avoid natural licorice or consuming large amounts of black licorice if taking digoxin (a heart medication) or a serious heart disturbance may result.

## MINERAL OIL

Mineral oil inhibits absorption in the intestine and causes fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, K) to pass through with little or no effect. It is recommended that mineral oil not be taken at bedtime because it can flow back up into the lungs and cause lipid pneumonia.

## ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES

Tegretol (carbamazepine) and Dilantin (phenytoin) can interfere with the breakdown and excretion of oral contraceptives, making them less effective.

## PHENOBARBITAL

Watch for aggressive behavior, hyperactivity, decreased cognitive functioning, irritability, lethargy, depression, and altered sleep patterns.

## PREDNISONE

Prednisone and similar cortisone drugs raise blood sugars in diabetics requiring the anti-diabetic medication to be adjusted while using these medications. Take with food.

## TETRACYCLINE

Take on an empty stomach 1 hour before or 2 hours after a meal. Do not take with dairy products or antacids (it binds to calcium, which alters the tetracycline to a form that cannot be absorbed by the body). Do not take with iron or zinc supplements. Avoid prolonged exposure to sunlight.

## ZARONTIN (ETHOSUXIMIDE)

Zarontin is used for control of absence seizures seen primarily in children. Consult with physician to assure accurate diagnosis if used for an adult.

## TIPS FOR AVOIDING MEDICATION ERRORS

These tips were developed for training persons who work in care facilities\*, however, the information is applicable to other caregivers also.

**Question the use of multiple tablets to provide a single dose of medicine.**

**Question any change in the color, size, or form of medication—double check the dosage on the label. Verify with the pharmacist that the dosage specified is correct.**

**Always read the label—ALWAYS. Sometimes medication packaging looks the same (same size, same color), but the medications are different.**

**Beware of trade names. Double check trade names with a drug reference that lists generic and brand name.**

**When in doubt about a procedure related to medication administration, check your facility's policy for guidance or ask your supervisor.**

**Be suspicious of any sudden large increases in medication dosages. Before giving CHECK.**

**If you are not familiar with the medication, check your drug reference information before giving the medication.**

**Never use a dropper from one medication to measure another medication—the graduated markings vary for each medication.**

**Always consider possible drug interactions.**

**Never use medications from an unlabeled container or from one on which the label is not readable.**

**If the information on a medication label is incomplete or unclear, check with your pharmacist or doctor before the medication is given.**

**Never give medications that have been prepared by some other person.**

**If a new medication is ordered, check the appropriate form for any medication allergies before the new medication is given.**

**Always prepare medication in a clean, quiet, well lit place.**

**Recite the "five rights" with each medication you prepare:**

• Right Person • Right Medication • Right Dose • Right Time • Right Route •

\* Medication Administration: Step-by-Step Guidelines. From training available through Lodi Memorial Hospital. See "Announcements" for information.

## MEDICATIONS AND DENTAL CARE

The dentist that takes care of your dental needs requires the same information that you share with your other doctors. Especially be sure to mention if you are taking Dilantin, since it can cause enlarged and overgrown gum tissues. Any prescription or over-the-counter drugs that you are taking could interfere with, or cause, adverse reactions with anesthetics or other medications used before, during, or after dental work. Be sure to tell the dentist the same information and ask the same types of questions listed in the "What to Tell the Doctor" and "What to Ask the Doctor/Pharmacist About Medications" sections.

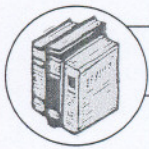
### OUR THANKS TO



Ed Anamizu, PharmD, is our consulting editor for this issue. He is currently Clinical Pharmacist at Lodi Memorial Hospital Transitional Care Unit,

Pharmacy Consultant to Regional Center East Bay Multidisciplinary Team, and the Therapeutic Medication Review Consultant to the Delta Regional Project. He was the Clinical Pharmacist at Stockton Developmental Center for nine years.

Mary Jann, RN, Dept. of Health Services Health Facility Evaluator, Long Term Care Policy Unit ICF/MR Specialist; Health Service Specialist, Stockton Developmental Center; over 10 years experience as a Nurse Reviewer for California State Licensing.



## RESOURCES

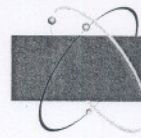
### PUBLISHED MATERIALS

**FDA Tips for Taking Medicines: How to Get the Most Benefit with the Fewest Risks;** reprint, publication number FDA 96-3221. Food and Drug Administration, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20857; Attn: HFE-88 (for single copy); Attn: HFI-40 (for 2-25 copies); or fax order to (301) 443-9057. Price: Free. The reprint includes a patient check-off chart for help in taking medications at the right time. Special sections advise patients on medications while in the hospital, protection against tampering, medication counseling, and tips for giving medicine to children.

**Drugs and Disabilities: Handle with Care;** 1995. McGowan, Karen Green, RN, CDDN. Mariah Management, 1153 Bergen Park Way #M438, Evergreen, CO 80439; 303-526-5009 / 800-856-5007. Price: \$23.95. This manual addresses drug related issues in detail.

**Epilepsy Management for the Person with Mental Retardation.** Smith, Carolyn J., RN. Mariah Management, 1153 Bergen Park Way #M438, Evergreen, CO 80439; 303-526-5009 / 800-856-5007. Price: \$22.95. This manual includes: seizure types, drugs, side effects of common drugs, adverse effects, first aid, health care planning and documentation.

**Psychopharmacological Medications, Safety Precautions for Persons with Developmental Disabilities.** Federal Department of Health & Human Services, Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), Attn: Dr. Samuel Kidder, 7500 Security Boulevard, Baltimore MD 21244-1850. Price: Free. A self-addressed, self-adhesive address label must be included with your request. Developed by HCFA for training and education of Intermediate Care Facilities/MR staff, but also appropriate for any professional and/or caregiver of services to individuals with developmental disabilities.



## OFF THE NET

This section of our Wellness Digest is devoted to the health and wellness resources to be found on the World Wide Web. Off the Net lists sites with information on wellness, prevention, techniques, resources, best practices and other topics of interest to the Wellness Initiative.

Department of Developmental Services (DDS)  
<http://www.dds.cahwnet.gov>

Food and Drug Administration (FDA): <http://www.fda.gov>  
This site has information about FDA activities and a variety of other information, such as drug testing, newly approved drugs, drug warnings, etc. It also has the FDA Consumer, the agency's official consumer magazine. A couple of specific pages to check out at this site are: "Making It Easier to Read Prescriptions" [http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/695\\_prescrip.html](http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/695_prescrip.html)  
"FDA Proposes Program to Give Patients Better Medication Information" and "Tips for Taking Your Medication." [http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/995\\_medinfor.html](http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/995_medinfor.html)

Healthtouch® <http://www.healthtouch.com>  
This site has drug information, a health resource directory, product information and health information. Be sure to see their "Guide to Taking Medications" at: <http://www.healthtouch.com/level1/leaflets/103068/103068.htm>



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