

**Statement of Sen. Herb Kohl**  
**“Overprescribed: The Human and Taxpayers’ Costs of Antipsychotics in Nursing Homes”**  
**Senate Special Committee on Aging Hearing**  
**November 30, 2011**

Good Afternoon. I call this hearing to order, and welcome our witnesses. Today we will discuss the widespread, costly and often harmful use of antipsychotics in nursing homes and the efforts to find safe and effective alternatives.

While antipsychotic drugs have been approved by the FDA to treat an array of psychiatric conditions, numerous studies have concluded that these medications can be harmful when used by frail elders with dementia who do not have a diagnosis of serious mental illness. In fact, the FDA issued two “black box” warnings citing increased risk of death when these drugs are used to treat elderly patients with dementia.

Despite these warnings, there has been little impact on antipsychotic prescription rates in long-term care facilities for dementia patients who do not have a diagnosis of psychosis. The most recent data indicates increasing usage of antipsychotics among nursing home residents with dementia, and that more than half of these patients have been prescribed these drugs.

Improper prescribing not only puts patient’s health at risk, it also leads to higher health costs. We will hear testimony by the HHS Office of Inspector General that the use of antipsychotics in nursing homes for patients without a diagnosis of mental illness is costing taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

We can do better. Our second panel features experts, including Tom Hlavacek from my home state of Wisconsin, who will discuss safe and effective alternatives to using antipsychotics to deal with behavior issues in older dementia patients.

When properly prescribed, antipsychotics can offer beneficial treatment for individuals suffering from mental illness. However, we have a responsibility to patients and their families to ensure that elderly nursing home residents are free from all types of unnecessary drugs, and we have a responsibility to taxpayers to be certain that they are not paying for drugs that are not needed. Toward that end, I will continue working with my committee colleagues and Senator Grassley to address these issues.

Thank you all for being here. We will now turn to Senator Bob Corker for his opening remarks.