

Drugs and seniors can be dangerous



RENEE MAHLER

Drug abuse, among older adults, is fast becoming an extremely serious problem. It has been approximated that one in seven hospital admissions, for older people, is drug related. It is only recently that researchers are studying the use and effects of drugs on seniors and the results have been frightening.

Many older people take up to six or more prescribed medications daily. This does not include over-the-counter drugs such as aspirin, sleeping aids and laxatives. The danger lies in the fact that many people have health problems directly caused by overmedications or misuse of their medications. Studies have revealed this misuse of drugs can result in symptoms like confusion, irritability or forgetfulness. Misuse of medications also can cause death.

It is important to remember that as normal aging occurs, the body changes. The way our bodies react to drugs changes also. What may occur is that some drugs may have more powerful effects while others may not work as well. As we age so do the organs that process drugs, and their ability to handle medications lessens. Side effects, never experienced previously, are not uncommon.

In addition to overmedication, the problems of mixing medicines and not following the physician's precise orders — in relation to dosage and frequency — are growing. The mixing of medications and alcohol and the usage of addicting-type drugs adds to the seriousness of the problem. Another growing concern is the 'trading' of medications. What helps one person is not necessarily good for another.

Drugs should never be taken unless they are prescribed specifically for the user.

There are several ways older adults can try to protect themselves from becoming drug abusers. Question the doctor or pharmacist about medications and their usage and side effects. Tell the doctor or pharmacist if you are taking other medications and ask if there is any danger involved. Make certain you fully understand how much and when to take the medication and be sure to keep track.

Also ask how long the drug

should be taken. If you experience any unusual reactions, your physician should be called immediately. Also remember that taking someone else's medicines is extremely dangerous. Reactions vary from person to person. Throw away your old prescriptions. While some drugs lose their effectiveness as time passes, some can become toxic. Avoid alcohol if you are taking drugs.

The combination of the two can be fatal. Using all the information you can get about the drugs you take and using some common sense can save your life.

Q. My husband has had multiple sclerosis for some time. Getting around is becoming more and more difficult for him. We are considering buying a three-wheeled scooter but know nothing about them. Can you give us some ideas on what to look for?

A. Probably the first thing to do, when considering purchasing a scooter, is to determine the needs of the person using it. Another consideration is whether or not the user's home is suitable for using a scooter. Doors must be wide enough to accommodate it and a ramp may be necessary for outdoors. Questions concerning maintenance and warranties should be asked. Where is service available, is the scooter easily disassembled so that it can be moved in a car's trunk or back seat, are added conveniences such as a power seat available, what type of batteries are used and are replacement parts stocked by the dealer?

As with any large purchase, you should shop around and compare prices. The scooters come in a number of designs and sizes and you should make certain that if you buy one it provides the services and comfort needed by the user. Most medical supply houses carry three-wheeled scooters and the average price, at the suppliers I called, seems to be around \$2,600.

Renee Mahler is a gerontologist and the director of communications and admission at a Rochester Hills nursing facility. She is a former member of the Michigan State Commission on Services to the Aging.

To leave a message for Mahler, from a touch-tone phone, call 953-2047, Ext. 1869. Send your questions to her at the Observer & Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

Gala from page 1H

Giltz salon and Optical Illusions flowers.

For the evening, parents and grandparents may bring children's photos that artist Becky Lyzen will use to create keepsake pencil portraits. Other activities will include demonstrations of scarf tying and pillow painting. A special appearance will be made by Shawn Hare, one of the newest members of the Detroit Tigers, whose mother is a member of the Meadow Brook Theatre Guild.

The 96-member guild, which is 15 years old, is headed this season by Shirley Wells.

The guild has teamed with Jacobson's and the mall for five years to inaugurate the holiday season, but this is the first time celebrities will sign and wrap for gala-goers.

Recent fund-raising events have enabled the guild to purchase a new stage curtain, costly and highly technical electrical equipment, and an entrance canopy for the theater. The guild also provides a car for the actors to use while they are performing at Meadow Brook Theatre.

Supper and breakfast for the technical crew is provided by guild members on nights when the crew takes down an old set and builds a new one in 24 hours. Actors staying in trailers receive welcome baskets filled with food and other essentials, from the guild.

Other guild fund-raisers include the annual spring Luncheon on the Aisle; a touring costume show through the year and more recently, Spotlights, a juried arts and crafts show.



Jeanne Arnold, star of 24 Meadow Brook productions, most recently "Gin Game," will wrap gifts.



Nancy Golick (left) and Sharon Donnelly in period costume will escort gala-goers to meet celebrity guests including Monte Nagler, O&E columnist and award-winning photographer.



Ernie Harwell, the voice of the Detroit Tigers, and his wife Lulu will be among celebrity wrappers at the gala. Ernie will sign copies of his book "Diamond Gems."

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