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## Business

# Texas nursing homes prescribe more antipsychotics than most states

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Texas health care providers prescribe antipsychotic drugs to nursing home patients at rates that outpace almost every other state, according to a new national report.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services revealed that about one in five nursing home patients in Texas -- or about 19,000 -- take these drugs each month. Only Louisiana and Mississippi had higher prescription rates in the last three months of 2015, the federal agency reported.

Nursing home staffs often use antipsychotic drugs like Abilify, Risperdal and Seroquel to inappropriately sedate dementia patients, medical professionals say. Doctors have long used these medications to relieve dementia patients of anxiety and other symptoms.

The AARP said patients with Alzheimer's and other dementia should take only small doses of the drugs because side effects include elevated blood sugar levels, increased risk of falling and complications with cancers.

But it's not all bad.

Data show the appeal for doctors to give these drugs is waning nationally and in Texas. That's thanks in part to a broad coalition of health care advocates and providers in the state and around the country teaming up to take on the issue.

There is a culture change under way within the health care industry to correct the missteps, people working to fix the problem say. This is not unlike the way medical professionals moved away from using electroshock therapy for patients with mental illnesses.

More health care professionals understand that using antipsychotics to lessen the symptoms of illnesses like dementia is not beneficial for patients. These drugs were originally meant to treat schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, not to suppress anxiety, delusions or aggression.

"The right people are at the table," said Gloria Bean-Williams, a nurse and certified dementia practitioner working with the Texas Health Care Association.

"Everybody is speaking the same language that this is important for our residents, our physicians, our families."

Since 2011, federal citations for overuse of these medications have increased, a metric that underscores legislative pressure on this issue. During that time, the drugs' prevalence among long-stay patients has fallen by about 28 percent nationally.

In the United States, there were about 60 million antipsychotic prescriptions dispensed in 2014, according to data from market research firm IMS Health. That's about 5.4 million more than 2009's count. Those figures include

all antipsychotics, not just the ones from nursing homes.

Annual sales revenue for Abilify, one of the most popular antipsychotic drugs, rose from \$4 billion in 2009 to \$7.8 billion in 2014, according to IMS Health. And Seroquel reached more than \$1 billion in 2011; in 2014, the company's sales totaled \$1.3 billion.

Crushing pill use is not the only goal, advocates say. Health care professionals are rethinking how to treat Alzheimer's more effectively with methods like music therapy.

"The important thing is to realize the use of the medications was probably reflecting a need for us to provide better treatments," said Dr. Susan Levy, president of the Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine.

"There has never been an expectation that there would be no more drugs."

Texas Health Care Association is among the many organizations working to fix this problem. Earlier this year, it launched a campaign, **One A Month**, to educate industry people and families. Its goal is to slowly but surely wean people off these drugs and promote alternatives to drugs.

Not all antipsychotic medications given to Alzheimer's patients are administered at nursing homes. "Sometimes they'll get these medications to try to keep the person at

home," Bean-Williams said.

That's why it's important to not only work with nursing homes but all stakeholders in mental illness care.

"If you focus on one patient a month, we can effectively and rapidly reduce the use of antipsychotics," Texas Health Care Association CEO Kevin Warren said. "When you're talking about safe reduction, this is not something where you take them off the drug and you're done. It takes time."

The government has strict requirements for nursing homes. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the agency that tracks drug use, monitors the quality of each of these facilities in the nation.

Of 36 nursing homes in Dallas, 21 earn less than the full five stars in the agency's quality ratings. Seven are four-star; 12 are three-star; two are two-star. One is too new to be rated.

You can see for yourself how The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services rated North Texas nursing homes at [medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare](https://www.medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare).

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give them weed.....thank you!

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The same happens to children in foster care. It is easier to meet the needs of catatonic people than dealing with humans.

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Easy to control the lethargic! Sadly, do many have side effects worse than the dementia!

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That is because nursing homes do not want to deal with "reality" also known as LIFE.

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Because they are chock full of retired liberal journalists.

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I don't understand why this is surprising, everyone knows people down here in Texas are crazy

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Maybe there are ore psychotics in Texas.

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I remember making friends with a particular nurse on the day shift, who commented to me that more often than not, family members became non existent once the loved one was admitted. They knew which patients had local family members, and which ones did not.