

Special Notice



WASHINGTON
**Medical
Commission**
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Inappropriate Use of Antipsychotic Medications And Erroneous Diagnosis of Schizophrenia in Nursing Homes

Issue

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) are responsible for the oversight and health and safety of [nursing home residents](#). Over the past decade, through the work of the [National Partnership to Improve Dementia Care](#), CMS has been monitoring antipsychotic medication use in nursing homes. Though steps have been taken to reduce the use of these drugs, there continue to be concerns that nursing home residents may be inappropriately prescribed antipsychotic medications due to being erroneously diagnosed and coded as having schizophrenia; see the [Office of Inspector General report](#) for more information. Antipsychotic medications are dangerous among the vulnerable nursing home population because of their potential side effects, including death.

Efforts to Address the Issue

To increase our focus on this issue, CMS recently announced they will be conducting off-site [nursing home audits](#) ¹ to assess the accuracy of resident assessments (collected through the [Minimum Data Set \(MDS\)](#)). Specifically, to determine whether or not the facility is appropriately assessing, diagnosing, and coding schizophrenia in the MDS for residents in their facility. These efforts are aligned with the latest actions under [The White House Fact Sheet: Protecting Seniors by Improving Safety and Quality of Care in the Nation's Nursing Home](#). If the audit reveals a pattern of inaccurate coding, this practice will negatively impact a facility's [Five-Star Quality Rating System](#) on Nursing Home Care Compare. It is rare for individuals older than 40 years of age to be diagnosed with schizophrenia² Nursing homes should work with their psychiatric providers and medical directors to ensure the appropriate professional standards and processes are being implemented related to diagnosing individuals with schizophrenia.

Note

In addition to CMS' actions, we believe that some of these instances may represent actions that are inconsistent with the expectations of the board of licensure. As such, if there are instances where a practitioner has not followed professionals' standards of practice for diagnosing individuals and prescribing medications, we believe these practitioners should be referred to their respective state medical boards for investigation.

For questions and to obtain more information, please contact DNH_BehavioralHealth@cms.hhs.gov.

¹ Updates to the Nursing Home Care Compare Website and Five Star Quality Rating System: Adjusting Quality Measure Ratings Based on Erroneous Schizophrenia Coding, and Posting Citations Under Dispute <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/qso-23-05-nh.pdf>

² National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). "Schizophrenia." Accessed March 2, 2021. <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/MentalHealthConditions/Schizophrenia>



Special Notice

Changes to the WSF Medical Preferential Loading Program

Improvements to WSF's Medical Preferential Loading program are effective Monday, March 20 and are aimed at making the process easier for patients and their medical providers to use as well as making it easier for our staff to administer and track.

New Application Process

Health care providers will work with their patients to submit an application for them online, from the Medical Preferential Loading webpage, [Medical preferential loading | WSDOT \(wa.gov\)](#). The updated webpage, and the Rules and Regulations document will be available when the online program launches on March 20. Once submitted, the health care provider and customer will both receive a confirmation email. The customer will need a printed copy of this confirmation email and will present it with their ID, or a minor's guardians' ID, when traveling. Providers will no longer need to contact WSF for applications or fax them to terminals.

No More Faxes

The primary change is eliminating the need to fax applications by moving the program online and launching a new webpage for health care providers to submit an application on behalf of their customers. Faxed applications will no longer be accepted starting March 20. A 90-day grace period will be implemented on that date for customers who have their applications faxed in before March 20. Terminal staff will accept these through their individual expiration dates or not after June 18, whichever comes first.

Additional Changes

Several other changes to the Medical Preferential Loading program may affect health care providers and customers. Please review the following changes:

- Single-Day, Multi-Day (30), and Annual Preferential Loading options are available for qualified applicants.
- Customers are required to show their IDs with the confirmation email to verify approved use of the Medical Preferential Loading program.
- The confirmation email will include directions and guidelines for when customers arrive at the terminal, and how to renew with their provider.
- Only doctors, physicians, RNs, and affiliated positions with a professional license number may fill out and submit an application.

We will be distributing information about the program changes to all Medical Preferential Loading customers in the coming weeks. Customers can also call our Customer Service Center [Contact Washington State Ferries](#) with any additional questions at 206-464-6400.

Our goal with these changes is to modernize this program, so it is a much smoother and efficient experience for customers, health care providers, and our ferry system.

