At a Health Canada's database captures adverse drug reaction (ADR) primarily caused by side effects from medications. Although many of these medication-related problems in long-term care and nursing homes originate from adverse reactions and the use of high-risk medications, medication errors are also part of the problem. ISMP Canada has started receiving reports from practitioners working in long-term care and nursing homes that involve medication errors. These include seniors receiving wrong medications or wrong doses of the medication. Other issues that compound this problem include the fact that these patients are at a greater risk for harm to occur due to their advanced age and a decreased ability to recover, multiple medical issues, and the use of multiple medications. A review and analysis of some of these errors in long term care has also demonstrated that they are rooted with system-based issues. Communication issue, environmental and staff shortages are some of the key underlying factors.

The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has engaged ISMP Canada to begin working with long term care facilities in an effort to enhance medication system safety. The medication safety team with the guidance of the advisory group has identified a number of priorities to be addressed in the next few years including enhancing systems for high risk medications such as narcotics, insulin and warfarin. In addition, a comprehensive list of safe practices for long term care facilities in a form of a self-assessment is also being developed by ISMP Canada. This medication safety self-assessment tool will provide a mechanism for facilities and practitioners to assess their medication system and to identify gaps in an effort to prioritize improvement efforts. Input from a number of provinces will be sought to ensure the tool can be used by facilities across Canada. Further patients transferring from one care facility to another is often a vulnerable point in the health care system. ISMP Canada is also leading a project on medication reconciliation for patients being transferred between acute care hospitals and long term care facilities/home. ISMP Canada encourages practitioners in long term care facilities to report medication errors and hazardous situations that can be shared and learned by others. Reports can be submitted to the ISMP Canada’s web site: www.ismp-canada.org.

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