



Dear Primary Care Provider Colleague,

We are writing to draw your attention to medications considered high-risk for older patients enrolled in the Commonwealth Care Alliance (CCA) Senior Care Options (SCO) program. The current list of high-risk medications is derived from the 2012 updated Beers list (Journal of the American Geriatrics Society 2012; 60:616-631) and is used to assess the quality of care delivered by health plans and providers to older patients.

Fortunately, three of the most frequently prescribed high-risk medications – glyburide, amitriptyline, and zolpidem - have safer alternatives.

Glyburide – This sulfonylurea oral hypoglycemic agent has a prolonged half-life in older patients and confers an increased risk of severe and prolonged hypoglycemia. **Glipizide** is a safe and appropriate shorter-acting alternative.

Amitriptyline (Elavil) – This tricyclic antidepressant, often used off-label for neuropathic pain, is highly anticholinergic and causes dry mouth, constipation, urinary retention, and confusion in older patients.

Nortriptyline and **Desipramine** are safer alternatives (Neurology 1998; 51:1166-1171; New England Journal of Medicine 1992; 326:1250-1256).

Zolpidem (Ambien) – This non-benzodiazepine benzodiazepine-receptor agonist is a popular sedative-hypnotic but, like benzodiazepines, increases the risk of falls, hip fractures, and confusion in older patients (Journal of the American Geriatrics Society 2001; 49:1685-1690). Although the other medications in this class - eszopiclone (Lunesta), zaleplon (Sonata) - are also on the 2012 updated Beers list, alternative approaches exist. These include non-pharmacologic attention to sleep hygiene or, if medications are necessary, **melatonin**, the melatonin agonist **ramelteon (Rozerem)**, or low-dose **trazodone**. Please remember that sedative-hypnotics are only recommended for short-term use.

We have enclosed a table listing all the high risk medications on the updated Beers list along with possible alternatives.

Please do not hesitate to contact either one of us if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your cooperation and for your care of our members.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A Burrows".

Adam Burrows, MD
Medical Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B Shebli".

Basem Shebli, Pharm D, MBA
Director of Pharmacy