

# A safe benzodiazepine guideline for elderly inpatients

## Introduction

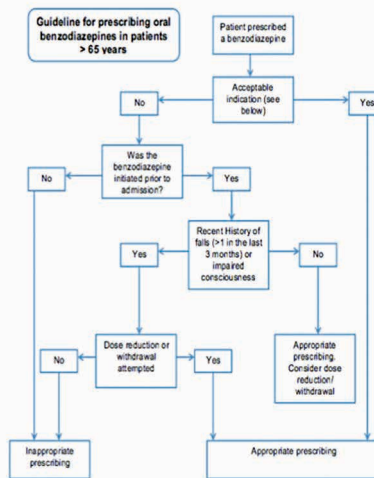
Benzodiazepines are a class of medications that are commonly used, and misused, in the elderly. This is despite benzodiazepines being well known to cause falls, cognitive impairment, and delirium. A team of junior doctors led a multidisciplinary effort to reduce the misuse of benzodiazepines in elderly people who are admitted to hospital.

In a collaboration between junior medical personnel, nursing staff, allied health and administrative staff, the project aimed to identify the extent of benzodiazepine prescription (for acute insomnia) within the Hunter New England Local Health District, assess the appropriateness of prescribing benzodiazepines to inpatients over the age of 65, provide guidance to staff about the risks of harm to patients associated with benzodiazepine use, and reassess and establish positive change.

## Key activities

With demand for sleeping tablets high on the evening ward shift, the project committee feared adverse effects were often overlooked.

Flowchart featured in *Appropriate Prescribing of Oral Benzodiazepines in Patients over the Age of 65* guideline



Using a retrospective audit as the main assessment tool, the committee identified a clear lack of literature and hospital policy.

The project was able to streamline communication and collaboration with clinical and non-clinical staff, and build close ties with university students, looking to help develop quality improvement projects.

## Key achievements

Appropriate benzodiazepine prescriptions for insomnia improved from 30 per cent to 66 per cent year on year.

Falls within the John Hunter health service reduced from 177 between May and July 2013 to 156 falls by the period covering April to June in 2014, a reduction of 11.9 per cent.

This project has generated interest in the promotion of good sleep for inpatients and resulted in statewide interest in developing a guideline to limit the harm caused by benzodiazepines.

