



Psychotropic meds reduction program in Tas

NEIL BRAMWELL

A SUCCESSFUL pilot program to reduce the use of psychotropic medication in Tasmanian nursing homes will be rolled out nationally over three years.

A national sample of 10,000 residential medication management reviews found more than 70% of residents were prescribed psychotropic medication.

Researchers identified high levels of multiple psychotropic use as an area of particular concern. Some 20% of residents were taking antidepressants and benzodiazepines and 14% were taking antipsychotics and benzodiazepines concurrently. Residents with dementia were almost four times more likely to be prescribed an antipsychotic.

The research will be presented at the International Psychogeriatric Congress in Korea in October. Study leader Dr Juanita Westbury, of the University of Tasmania's School of Pharmacy, said urgent action was required to address "over-reliance" on the drugs.

"These drugs have limited effectiveness but the research showed they were not reviewed very well by doctors and pharmacists," she said.

Dr Westbury's program to raise drug awareness among nursing staff at 25 residential homes reduced benzodiazepine use from 40% to 23% within 18 months, and antipsychotic use from 22% to 18%. It is now being extended to 150 nursing homes across Australia over three years with a \$3 million budget.

"I realised how influential nursing staff and carers were in the use of these medications but found that nurses had limited knowledge of side-effects, doses or what the drugs did. Nurses were the drivers of the change," she said. ■