



Date: November 21, 2013
Contact: Cynthia Stevenson-Phelps
Cell Phone: 509-954-2390
E-mail: cyndysp@multi-servicecenter.com

For Immediate Release

Ombudsmen Tackle Misuse of Antipsychotic Drugs and Advocate for Elders

The Washington Long Term-Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP), a statewide advocacy group organized and authorized by federal and state laws to promote and protect the rights of individuals living in long-term care facilities, is participating in a recently launched state-wide initiative to build consumer awareness about the misuse of antipsychotic drugs, and the subsequent real and potential harm. This initiative, "Reduce the Misuse" is made possible by a grant awarded to LTCOP by the state Attorney General's Office, funded by a settlement with Janssen Pharmaceuticals, a subsidiary of Johnson and Johnson, for the wrongful marketing of atypical anti-psychotic drugs to nursing homes and nursing home pharmacies. The seriousness of this problem is most recently again revealed when the United States Attorney General Eric Holder announced that Johnson & Johnson and three of its subsidiaries have agreed to pay more than \$2.2 billion to settle both civil and criminal claims that they marketed prescription drugs for unapproved uses, and that they paid kickbacks to doctors and pharmacies to get these drugs prescribed. The marketing of Risperdal, an atypical anti-psychotic, to control the behavior of residents in long-term care facilities suffering from dementia was a major focus of the claims.

Washington's Office of the State Long Term-Care Ombudsman Program (SLTCOP), in partnership with local regional subcontractors and their volunteer ombudsmen, is working to inform residents, their family members and the public about the prevalence of misuse of antipsychotics with the elderly who have dementia. Patricia Hunter, State Long-Term Care Ombudsman stated: " During the '90's, after

landmark federal Residents' Rights Laws were passed, we did away with rampant physical restraint use in our care facilities, but we didn't really address the growing problem of chemical restraints." Hunter added, that there's national momentum building for the deployment of evidence based training for care staff that support people who have dementia such as learning how to communicate with someone who has Alzheimer's or knowing how to recognize signs of pain, hunger and discomfort by someone who has advanced Alzheimer's or dementia symptoms. Over 100 of the 350 volunteer and paid long-term care ombudsmen have been trained to date on how to inform consumers and others about the legal aspects to using antipsychotics, the potential health impacts and what consumers, family members and caregivers can do to remedy any problems and concerns. The initiative includes information and resources about how antipsychotics are being misused to control typical but challenging behaviors associated with dementia, in place of using proper dementia caregiving techniques.

"We know much more now, than we did in the 1990's, through applied research about what makes for great dementia or Alzheimer's care, and that using expensive drugs such as Risperdal, creates 'excessive disability' rather than help elders who have dementia," stated Ms. Hunter. "We can stop the widespread use of chemical restraints by informing consumers and their family members about these drugs, and by having well-trained caregivers and proper staffing in our care settings." Recent statistics gathered by the Center for Medicare/Medicaid Services show there is a broad range in the use of antipsychotic drugs. The national average of use in nursing homes is 21.14% and in Washington state it is 19.71%. The national goal by the federal agency is to reduce the use of antipsychotics to 15%. State licensing agencies along with quality assurance programs, advocates and the representatives from the long-term care industry are working together to address the problem.

#####