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The challenge

It's estimated that people over 75 account for at least 45% of the annual prescription cost, with 35 – 40% of them taking four or more medicines. A survey of GPs found that 79% of them were not confident that this cohort of patients were taking their medication correctly six months after consultation.

Failing to take medication as prescribed can lead to deterioration in health and increase the risk of confusion and falls.

How is Abbeyfield using medication dispensers to help the people it supports remain safe and independent for longer?

What we did

Abbeyfield is a national charity that provides care home and supported living accommodation and care at home services throughout the UK. It uses medication dispensers to help support many its residents, many of whom are anxious about taking their medicines correctly, or may have mild to moderate dementia. The dispensers have a 28-day carousel which can be filled by a family member, and provides visual and audible alerts to the user each time medication should be taken.

Abbeyfield staff and visiting home care staff can prompt residents to take medication, and assist them by providing a glass of water, but as they are not registered care providers they are unable to administer. Using the medication dispenser provides automatic reminders throughout the day to residents as required, and care visits can be timed to enable staff to confirm that medication has been accessed.

The dispenser can be used as a stand-alone device or can be linked to a Lifeline Vi home unit which in turn can raise an alert at the monitoring centre or on a mobile phone if medication is not taken at the correct times. Dispensers can also be linked to sensors such as flashing beacons to alert users who are hard of hearing for example.

Results

Non-compliance when taking medication can have serious adverse effects, whether from missing doses or overdosing. Anxiety related to worry regarding taking medicine properly can also have a negative effect on health, disrupting sleep and causing fatigue and confusion, in turn making it more difficult for residents to manage their medicines properly.

Using the medication dispenser helps residents to feel better because of taking their medication as prescribed, it also relieves the worry, for them and their families, that they are not taking their medicines properly.

Using the dispensers also supports staff as it makes it easier for them to prompt residents to take their medication at the right time, as they will be alerted by the unit when they visit if the resident has failed to take their medication. Residents find the dispenser easy to use, and respond well to staff reassuring them that if the unit isn't making a beeping noise then they have taken their medicines as they should, which gives them peace of mind.

Using medication dispensers also means that medicine is kept secure, as it is locked into the device and cannot be taken until the correct time. This avoids issues such as packets of tablets being opened and muddled or taken inappropriately.

The dispensers also support independence, giving residents the tools to manage medication themselves and increase their wellbeing, enabling them to remain at home for longer.