As long-term care providers work to improve resident quality of life by offering pain therapies for residents, they face a host of complex issues. These issues include treatment-resistant pain, polypharmacy, and residents unable to communicate or refuse medications. In addition, some residents may have cognitive impairments that prevent effective communication. This scenario can result in undertreatment, over-treatment, or both.

"There is a lack of effective pain management directly addressed in various sections of the MDS 3.0," explains Hardesty. "Medication management systems produce a strip of packets with the day, date and time of administration, but residents may not be able to comply with the dosing schedule."}

**No Pain = All Gain**

The key message, experts stress, is that pain management is anything but one-size-fits-all. "Pain management typically requires time and effort. Solutions that allow caregivers to administer a steady, consistent and reliable dose to residents are essential for alleviating pain and promoting living to the fullest,” notes Jennifer Hardesty, Pharm.D., a pain management specialist who operates several clinics in California. Because many long-term care residents experience severe or chronic pain, effective pain management is essential. "Pain management has become a hot topic and surveyors are actively looking at it," he added.

"It's become clear that the best intervention comes from better medication management practices under the microscope. In the process, they are pushing organization structure to accommodate new residents, STAT orders, first doses and PRNs. Without medication management systems, the right medications are often not available for those residents, says Carla Talyst, president and owner, Millennium Pharmacy Systems. “Remote dispensing, which makes medication available around the clock, is another solution that’s gaining traction. Remote dispensing systems have the ability to deliver doses of medication instantly, while also being able to control for frequency of use and maximum dosages over specific time periods.”

Onsite dispensing of medications may be a challenge and requires regular medication rotation, regardless of whether the medication is an oral or IV medication. "In the long-term care setting due to drug shortages and what some consider excessively strict federal regulations. Providers often experience delays in getting medications to the residents. This can lead to residents experiencing pain crisis after hours. If onsite dispensing isn’t available, contracting with pharmacies that offer 24-hour delivery and administration can help. If remote dispensing is not an option, then inventorying enough supplies to handle a drug shortage would be another solution.”

**Pain management**

"When a resident experiences severe pain, the traditional approach of increasing the dose of pain medication may not be effective," notes Lena Sturgeon, executive vice president, Millennium Pharmacy Systems. “Once the pharmacist has signed and approved the Schedule II narcotic prescription, the medication will always be available, on time, at the right doses and ready to go. This can be especially helpful for residents who experience a pain crisis after hours. Pain management has become a hot topic and surveyors are actively looking at it.”

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**Technological advancements**

"The key to effective pain management is a better understanding of the resident’s pain. Providers must take into account the resident’s history, preferences and goals of care," notes Jennifer Hardesty, Pharm.D., a pain management specialist who operates several clinics in California. Because many long-term care residents experience severe or chronic pain, effective pain management is essential. "Pain management has become a hot topic and surveyors are actively looking at it," he added.

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