From Dr. Escudé...

Medication Interactions as a Cause of Behavior in People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

In people who communicate in ways other than with words, behaviors are often used to communicate information to others. It is important to rule out underlying MEDICAL and DENTAL causes for adverse behaviors before initiating medications, restraints or other behavior modification initiatives.

Medication interactions and side effects can cause a number of symptoms that can be difficult to identify if a person does not have the ability to communicate them verbally. Pay particular attention to changes in behavior after a new medication is started or after a dosage change in an existing medication. Some behaviors that may be signs of medication issues include:

- Medication refusal as the person has learned that every time they take the medication, they feel bad
- Pocketing or “Cheeking” medications because of feeling poorly after taking them
- Blinking, possibly due to eye irritation
- Refusal to eat due to nausea or dry mouth
- Urinary or fecal incontinence
- Constipation
- Urinary retention
- Agitation and/or Aggression due to the medication or to the ill effects
- Fatigue, especially with sedating medications
- Weight gain or loss
- Scratching self as a sign of a possible allergy, even if no rash is present
- Falls due to sedation, dizziness or other balance or cognitive impairment
- Change in cognitive status
- Less verbally interactive
- Tics, dystonic symptoms or muscle twitching, especially with medications known to cause extra-pyramidal symptoms (EPS) or signs of tardive dyskinesia (TD)
- Breakthrough seizures
Awareness of drugs that may cause anticholinergic side effects, TD and EPS is very important. Your careful review of medications for interactions and side effects is very valuable to each patient.

Thanks for your careful attention to helping improve the lives of people we support.

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Dr. Escudé has dedicated his career to providing healthcare for people with IDD and other vulnerable populations and teaches on the subject throughout the country.