From Dr. Escudé...

Polypharmacy Concerns in People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) often take a number of medications. Sometimes they are necessary, but careful consideration should always be given to reducing the dosage or number of medications a person is taking to the lowest effective dose. People with IDD sometimes have limited ability to communicate with words and therefore may communicate through various behaviors. They may communicate the symptoms of medication side effect and drug interactions by not eating (because of nausea or constipation), verbal or physical aggression, not participating in once enjoyable activities, and even talking and interacting less with others due to sedation or just plain feeling bad.

Whenever a person’s behavior changes, it’s important to evaluate the medications a person is taking to see if something new has been added or a dose has been changed that can be the cause.

When adding a new medication or increasing the dosage, monitor the person closely for the next few weeks to look for negative effects which might require discontinuation of the medication. Also monitor for the expected improvement from the medication to evaluate efficacy. If the medication is not achieving its goal, consider stopping the medication before adding another one on top of it.

Routinely review all medications a person is taking, even if they are stable on them, to see if they are still necessary. Sometimes someone is placed on a medication and it’s continued indefinitely without a good reason.

Careful and regular review of the medications a person is taking for efficacy and side effects is warranted to minimize complications of medications. Thanks for your careful attention to helping improve the lives of people we support.
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.