

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**OLDER ADULTS ARE AT INCREASED RISK OF SERIOUS AND OFTEN  
PREVENTABLE MEDICINE USE RELATED PROBLEMS**

***National Education Campaign Launch to Educate Older Adults about the  
MUSTS of Safe Medicine Use Coincides with “Talk About Prescriptions” Month***

(Bethesda, MD - October 1, 2007) - - **The National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE)** - - a non-profit coalition of more than 100 organizations working to improve communication on the appropriate use of medicines -- today launched **Medication Use Safety Training for Seniors™ (MUST for Seniors™)** a national education awareness campaign to promote safe and appropriate medicine use among America’s older adults.

“Medicines are important therapeutic tools for living well in later life, but there are also risks, especially among older adults, who take more medicines than any other age group in the United States,” said Ray Bullman, Executive Vice President, NCPIE. “The **MUST for Seniors™** program encourages older adults and their caregivers to learn about the medicines they use, be active partners in their health care, and routinely talk about medicines with their healthcare providers.”

Studies reveal that most older Americans live with at least one chronic condition (e.g., arthritis, heart disease, diabetes), take multiple medicines, consult several healthcare providers and use more than one pharmacy. The convergence of these factors, in addition to age-related changes that affect the way certain drugs work in the body, as well as important communication gaps about medicines between patients and their providers, set the stage for potentially serious drug-related problems, including additional illness, hospitalization and even death.

**MUST for Seniors™** is an interactive program designed to give older adults and caregivers the tools and know-how to avoid medication misuse, recognize and manage common side effects, and improve medicine use knowledge, attitudes, and skills to avoid medication errors. Older adults and caregivers can attend a **MUST for Seniors™** workshop in communities across the country or access the educational workshop materials online and download a variety of useful materials at [www.mustforseniors.org](http://www.mustforseniors.org).

“Older adults must take the necessary steps to manage their medicines and guard against problems, including harmful drug interactions, which are especially common when taking multiple medicines,” said Bullman. “**MUST for Seniors™** offers community service groups and health organizations a variety of educational resources to use throughout the year to inform and educate for safe medicine use.”

**more**

A study in the September 10, 2007, issue of the *Archives of Internal Medicine* finds the number of serious injuries and deaths reported to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration from medicines more than doubled from 1998 to 2005, further underscoring the need for public education about safe medicine use. When taken as directed, medicines can treat or delay the onset or progression of many chronic conditions, and greatly improve patients' quality of life—an increasingly salient issue among the nation's aging baby boomers.

#### Quick Facts: Older Adults and Medicine Use

- Older adults comprise 13 percent of the population, but account for 34 percent of all prescription medicine use and 30 percent of all over-the-counter (OTC) drug use.
- Most older adults—4 out of 5—live with one or more chronic conditions.
- Many take multiple medicines at the same time. A recent survey of 17,000 Medicare beneficiaries found that 2 out of 5 patients reported taking five or more prescription medicines.
- Older adults are at increased risk of serious adverse drug events, including falls, depression, confusion, hallucinations and malnutrition, which are an important cause of illness, hospitalization and death among these patients.
- Drug-related complications have been attributed to the use of multiple medicines and associated drug interactions, age-related changes, human error and poor medical management (e.g., incorrect medicines prescribed, inappropriate doses, lack of communication and monitoring).
- Almost 40% of seniors are unable to read prescription label, and 67% are unable to understand information given to them.

For references or additional background information, download NCPIE's Fact Sheet "**Medicine Use and Older Adults**," available at [www.mustforseniors.org](http://www.mustforseniors.org).

**For more information** about safely using medicines, visit the **MUST for Seniors™** web site at [www.mustforseniors.org](http://www.mustforseniors.org).

#### *About NCPIE*

Established in 1982, the **National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE)** is a diverse non-profit coalition that works to stimulate and improve the communication of information about the appropriate use of prescription and OTC medicines. **NCPIE's** more than 100 members include consumer organizations; patient advocacy groups; voluntary health agencies; health professional associations; health professional schools; health-related trade associations; prescription and over-the-counter pharmaceutical manufacturers; and local, state and federal government agencies. **NCPIE** sponsors national "**Talk About Prescriptions**" Month in October to call attention annually to the role and impact that high quality medicine communication can have in promoting better medicine use and improved health outcomes. For more information, visit [www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org).

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*Editor's Note:* Please feel free to use the following in your publication and/or online news content.

## **10 STEPS FOR SUCCESS: MANAGING YOUR MEDICINES**

- 1. Know your medicines**, including drug names, reasons for their use, potential side effects, and how to take them safely.
- 2. Take your medicines exactly as directed.** Read all of the labels and written instructions before taking each medicine. Ask your pharmacist or doctor if you don't understand the directions.
- 3. Continue taking all of your medicines until the doctor says to stop.** Contact your provider if you experience side effects. If cost is an issue, ask about generic options or check available **drug-assistance programs** at <http://www.talkaboutrx.org/paps.jsp>.
- 4. Keep a current list of your medicines.** This should include all prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, sample medicines, dietary supplements and herbal remedies.
- 5. Dispose of unused medicines properly. See:**  
<http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/news/press07/022007.html>
- 6. Store medicines in a cool and dry place.** That means keeping them away from the stove or direct sunlight and not using the medicine cabinet in the bathroom, which can be warm and damp.
- 7. Keep your medicines in one location** (away from children and pets) unless any need to be refrigerated.
- 8. Use only one pharmacy**, so your pharmacist can monitor which medicines you are taking. Take time to ask about possible interactions with all OTC drugs or supplements you use.
- 9. Ask your pharmacist or doctor before taking any over-the-counter (OTC) medicines** as some can be harmful in older adults.
- 10. Talk openly with your healthcare providers** about the medicines and supplements you take. Review them together to identify potential risks, or to see if any can be reduced or stopped.
  - Do not share your medicines with other people, including family members.
  - Bring an up-to-date medicine list to all of your doctor appointments.
  - Ask if there are simpler ways to take multiple medicines.

*Source:* **MUST for Seniors™**, [www.mustforseniors.org](http://www.mustforseniors.org) NCPiE 2007