



Drug Regimens in I/DD – Why They're so Complex

It's well-known that individuals with I/DD tend to have complicated medication regimens. They often take multiple prescription drugs and dosing may be very different from the general population. Here is a look into some of the reasons for the complexity.

Psychiatric Diagnoses

According to ANCOR, 92% of individuals with I/DD have psychiatric diagnoses, such as mood disorders, anxiety, behavior challenges, or psychotic disorders. In fact, mental illness among these individuals is 2.5 times more common than in the general population. What's surprising is that 32% take medication to manage moods, anxiety, or behavior, but don't have a psychiatric diagnosis.

In many cases, these complex medication regimens result from challenging behavior that doesn't respond to cognitive or behavioral therapy. Communication barriers can further compound behavioral issues, making it difficult to determine and address the root cause of the behavior.

Patients in this population often take multiple psychiatric medications, receive medications at high doses, or both. This increases the risk for side effects that may include dizziness, tremors, gastrointestinal issues, vision problems, or changes in appetite. In some cases, these side effects are severe enough that additional medications are prescribed to help manage them.

Physical Health Issues

Compared to the general population, individuals with I/DD have more physical health issues. These include seizure disorders, obesity, chronic pain, sleep disorders, Parkinson's disease, thyroid disorders, skin conditions, and gastrointestinal issues and are typically managed through medication.

Managing physical health issues can become more challenging in these individuals because of communication barriers. Often, pain or discomfort from an underlying health issue is expressed through seemingly unrelated behaviors. This may result in a psychiatric medication being added to the regimen.

Members of the I/DD community may be more prone to chronic conditions that require medication management. For example, up to half of individuals with Down syndrome have congenital heart disease, which contributes to lifelong issues. Pulmonary hypertension, metabolic conditions, and atherosclerosis are also common in this population. These conditions may start to affect the individual at a much younger age compared to the general population.

Your I/DD Pharmacist Can Help

Pharmacists who specialize in caring for the I/DD community are valuable partners in managing these complex regimens. Because they are experienced in dealing with complex medication regimens and understand the needs of this unique group of individuals, they can support your staff in achieving goals of care and ensuring your facility maintains compliance with applicable regulations.

