Medicines help maintain or improve our health. But if taken incorrectly, they can be dangerous – even deadly.

In some jurisdictions there are no safeguards in the legislation to prevent carers or unlicensed workers from giving medications, even high risk medications. If an aged care resident is not competent to self-administer their medicines, then only a registered nurse or enrolled nurse with relevant qualifications should do so. They have the training, knowledge and experience to perform this important role safely and know when to talk to a medical practitioner.

**MEDICINES IN AGED CARE – THE RISKS.**

Because people in aged care are old and usually infirm, they will often need to take prescribed medicines. These medicines are important because they can help them live longer, healthier lives and minimise pain and discomfort.

But medicines can also be harmful. If the wrong kind of medicine is taken, or the wrong dose (either too much or too little), at the wrong time of day, or not according to the directions on the bottle or packet, the outcome can be serious. People can feel sick or even die.

That's why it is essential for people in residential aged care to be given their medicines by trained people who know what they’re doing – registered nurses and enrolled nurses.
WHY ONLY TRAINED NURSES SHOULD GIVE MEDICINES.

As a part of their training, every registered nurse learns how medicines should be used. They know how to give them safely and in the way the laws say they should be given. They know about the changes that happen to a person’s body as they get older and about different chronic illnesses.

Registered nurses also have expert knowledge about what different medicines do, so they know what to look for to see if the medicines are having a good or bad effect. Crucially, they know when to stop giving a medicine if it is having a bad effect, and also what medicines to give in an emergency if a doctor is not available.

Enrolled nurses who have a qualification in medication administration can also give medicines. And they are qualified to recognise the bad impacts of the side-effects of medications and know when to bring this to the attention of the registered nurse.

NO ONE ELSE IS QUALIFIED TO GIVE MEDICINES.

Assistants in nursing or personal care workers are not qualified to give medicines. They can help people who are able to take their own medicines from a pre-packaged medicine container, but nothing more. Care workers should not be asked to give medicines because they have not been trained to understand why the person is taking the medicine, what it will mean if the person doesn’t take their medicines on time, or what to look for if a medicine is having a bad effect.

CONCERNED ABOUT A LOVED ONE OR RESIDENT?

People living in aged care have the right to be given their medicines by registered nurses and enrolled nurses who know how to give medicines safely and what the medicines will do to their body.

If you have any concerns, ask these questions:

- Are there enough registered and enrolled nurses on shift to properly administer medications?
- Is there enough handover time to discuss medication issues for residents?
- Are unqualified carers being made to administer medications because there are not enough registered and enrolled nurses on shift?

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT ANY OF THESE ISSUES.

1. Talk to the facility manager and explain your concerns. If you are a family member, write to the facility and indicate that you only want registered and enrolled nurses to administer medications.
2. If you are a carer and being asked to administer medications and you are concerned, contact the facility manager and let them know.
3. If your wishes are not complied with, or you are concerned about a resident or loved one's medication management, contact the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner at: agedcarecomplaints.gov.au
4. If you’re not already a member, join the ANMF or one of our branches at anmf.org.au
   (Your complaint to the aged care complaints commission can be anonymous, confidential or open.)

“PEOPLE WERE ON CHEMOTHERAPY TABLETS AND NOT GETTING THEM AT THE RIGHT TIME.”

— Gladys, Aged Care resident

morestaffforagedcare.com.au

Authorised by Annie Butler, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, 1/365 Queen Street, Melbourne

RATIOS FOR AGED CARE MAKE THEM LAW

NOW