



DIFFUSION IN ACTION:

IMPROVING VETERAN QUALITY OF LIFE THROUGH HOLISTIC MEDICATION MANAGEMENT

Challenge

Many Veterans find themselves taking multiple medications, especially in the later stages of life. Frequently these medications were prescribed long ago and can cause undesirable side effects, including reduced functional capacity. Additionally, this simultaneous use of multiple pharmaceuticals (known as polypharmacy) can lead to dangerous drug interactions. In many care settings, no standardized approach exists to holistically examine a patient's complete medication profile, identify Potentially Inappropriate Medications (PIM), and determine which medications are compatible, safe, necessary, and indicated.

Innovation

Dr. Sara Swathy Battar, a physician board-certified in Geriatrics, Hospice, and Palliative Care Medicine from the Central Arkansas Veterans Health Care System (CAVHS), frequently observed that patients transferred from acute to long-term care were taking upwards of 15-20 medications. Further investigation revealed Veterans often do not adhere to prescribed medication schedules due to side effects, confusion, and cost. To improve patient safety, comfort, and medication compliance, Dr. Battar developed a methodology to reduce undue polypharmacy by identifying and discontinuing unnecessary, ineffective, and inappropriate medications. To operationalize this methodology, known as VIONE, Dr. Battar teamed up with Academic



One of our Veterans on the dementia unit had been... non-conversant, non-interactive, and non-ambulatory for years. Through the VIONE approach, the pharmacist and clinicians worked together and deprescribed three medications... over 4 months. He [eventually] woke up singing, walking, lucid, and joyful. It was like seeing a miracle unfold in front of my eyes."

—Dr. Sara Swathy Battar, MD

Experience better health with

VIONE

A Safe Medication Deprescribing Tool

Detailing Pharmacist Dr. Kimberly Dickerson, Chief of Pharmacy Tim Cmelik, and Medical Center Director Dr. Margie Scott to create an electronic tracking system embedded into clinical profiles to capture data on deprescribed medications. The team has also been educating physicians, pharmacists, administrators, and others on the benefits of VIONE and the reduction of polypharmacy. The VIONE approach is not a substitute for careful clinical consideration, but in fact enhances it by prompting attention to non-pharmaceutical, whole health approaches.

After successful implementation at CAVHS, the VIONE practice has been shared with several other VA medical centers through the Diffusion of Excellence initiative.

How It Works

VIONE employs five categories to help determine which medications should be continued and discontinued:

- V**ital, life-saving medications = Continue and adjust as needed (e.g., diabetes, heart disease)
- I**mportant, for quality of life = Continue and consolidate where possible (e.g., pain, constipation)
- O**ptional, no major difference = Weigh benefits versus risks (e.g., vitamins, empiric, antibiotics)
- N**ot indicated/treatment complete = Stop or taper off (e.g., benefit unclear; medication causes more harm than benefit due to observed side effects)
- E**very medication has a diagnosis/indication of use = Reassess/justify

The most commonly deprescribed classes of medication are proton pump inhibitors/H2 blockers, blood pressure medications, and Over the Counter (OTC).

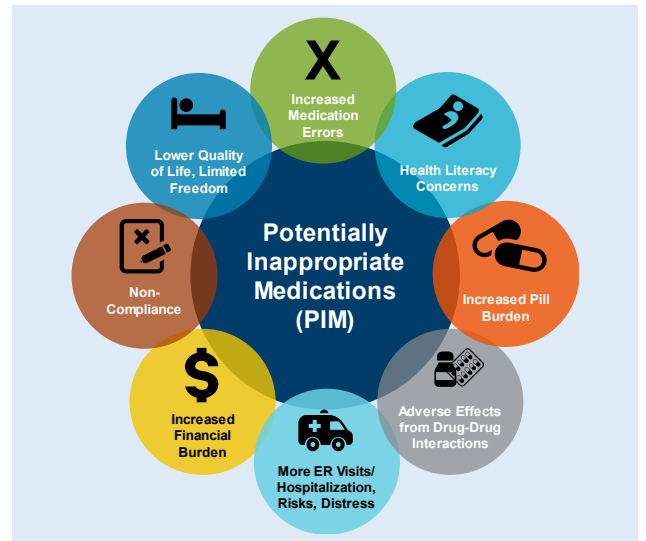
Impact

Deprescribing medications using VIONE has resulted in decreased pill burden and improved utilization of human and economic resources. From February 2016 to October 2018, over 10,000 Veterans have benefited from VIONE, with over 18,000 prescriptions deprescribed. This has translated into over \$3.3 M in annualized cost avoidance. Even more momentous, VIONE has improved patient safety and increased patient quality of life. As one Veteran put it: "I thought I was going to have to live the rest of my life in a horrible state! Every provider I went to see just added more and more medicines; but I felt only worse and worse with each additional pill! Then you guys came along and started stopping medications one by one and I felt stronger, my sleep was improved, my mental sharpness returned and I feel so much healthier overall! I now feel better than I have in many years! You guys have given me my life back and new hope for what lies ahead! Thank you so much!!!" As VIONE spreads to other facilities, the VIONE team trusts that the simple and user-friendly methodology will enhance awareness throughout health care delivery systems about the dangers of polypharmacy and the benefits of following the standardized, methodical format of VIONE.

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At Your Facility

For VIONE implementation to be successful, Drs. Battar and Dickerson emphasize the importance of a core team with a passion for patient safety, a genuine interest in implementing the VIONE methodology to facilitate planned cessation of PIMS, and the reduction of polypharmacy. To assist with implementation, the VIONE team created a toolkit and collected lessons learned (available on their VA Pulse Page). They may be reached at VAVIONE@va.gov.



**WANT TO
KNOW MORE?**

To learn more about VIONE, visit the [VIONE VA Pulse Page](#). If you want to submit a promising practice to the Diffusion of Excellence, visit the [Diffusion of Excellence VA Pulse page](#).