



**ENTRUST FIDUCIARY SERVICES, INC.**  
**ENTRUST GUARDIANSHIP SERVICES, LLC**  
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## **Questions to Ask before Consenting to Psychoactive Medications**

A Licensed Fiduciary is required to provide informed consent for the persons for whom we serve as guardian. Informed consent means that the guardian has been provided information on the nature of the treatment, possible alternative treatments, and the potential risks and benefits of the treatment. In order for informed consent to be considered valid, the consent must be given without coercion. Often we are asked to consent to psychoactive medications used to control behavioral symptoms of dementia in our elderly wards. Many times pharmacological interventions are inevitable. However, before providing consent to a psychoactive medication, a number of questions should be asked and answered:

**Has pain been ruled out as a cause of the undesirable behavior?** A geriatric pharmacist told me of a case in which a nursing home was able to reduce the use of psychoactive medications by 60% across all residents simply by administering acetaminophen (Tylenol) around the clock. People who are cognitively impaired do not articulate that they are feeling pain the same way non-impaired people do. They might just yell out or act aggressively. Pain should always be considered as a possible cause when behaviors like this suddenly develop.

**Has a urinary tract infection (UTI) been ruled out?** UTI places stress on the body. For a person with dementia, any stress can lead to undesirable behaviors. UTI can cause delirium and profound confusion, which is distinct from dementia and is reversible once the infection is cured. UTI is also painful in some cases, although as described above, the cognitively impaired patient may just seem angry or aggressive to the outside observer.

**Have environmental and other health factors been considered?** Examples could be lights and sounds in the home that disturb sleep. Is the patient refusing to eat or take medications? Perhaps the pills are too big to swallow and need to be crushed or changed to liquid form. Perhaps the patient is constipated.

**What non-pharmacological approaches have been attempted?** Caregivers trained to work with dementia patients must be skilled at re-direction and must be able to articulate what is occurring, what the patient is communicating, and what has been tried to curb the behaviors before resorting to medications.

There may be other factors to consider, as individuals are unique and different approaches work for different people and different circumstances. But these are among the important questions to have answered before consenting to psychoactive medications.