



National Prescribing Service Limited

Drug use evaluation

**Laxative use for chronic constipation
in aged care homes**

SAMPLE

Drug use evaluation of laxative use for chronic constipation in aged care homes

Everything you need to complete the drug use evaluation (DUE) can be found here.

Staff in aged care homes involved in medicine use can use these resources to undertake the DUE. For example an accredited pharmacist, a GP or a nursing staff member could lead the project and collect the initial data. A multidisciplinary team approach is ideal for successfully carrying out the DUE, preferably with an advisory team appointed to assist and advise during the program.

This activity is recognised by a number of health professional bodies as contributing to continuing education and professional development. To be eligible for professional development points on completion of this activity you must:

- Provide your details on the DUE access page on the NPS website, including your professional membership number (where applicable). If you did not do so before downloading this kit, please call Aine Heaney at the NPS on 02 8217 8700.
- Notify the NPS that you have completed this activity by submitting the evaluation survey 'What did you think of the DUE?' on the NPS website (at www.nps.org.au/DUE).

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For further information

Aine Heaney

Email: aheaney@nps.org.au Phone: 02 8217 8700 Fax: 02 9211 7578

The information contained in this material is derived from a critical analysis of a wide range of authoritative evidence.

Any treatment decision based on this information should be made in the context of the clinical circumstances of each patient.

How this drug use evaluation (DUE) can help in your aged care home?

DUE promotes optimal drug therapy by monitoring drug use through comparisons with specific standards and initiation of appropriate actions when drug use is inconsistent with these standards. It is a cyclic process and is most effective if the cycle is completed rather than various steps being performed in isolation.¹

Completing this DUE will allow you to:

- Determine the appropriateness of the use of laxative medication in your aged care home.
- Identify opportunities for improving quality use of these drugs, and act on them.
- To assist your aged care home meet components of the Residential Care Standards issued by the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency, in particular
 - Standard 2.1 relating to continuous improvement activities
 - Standard 2.7 where residents' medication is managed safely and correctly
 - Standard 2.12 where residents' continence is managed effectively.²
- To comply with the *Australian Pharmaceutical Advisory Council Guidelines for Medication Management in Residential Aged Care Facilities*, in particular Recommendation 3 – Medication Review where residents' medications should be reviewed by members of the health professional team.³
- Assist pharmacists to provide facility focused activities to promote the quality use of medicines (in line with Pharmaceutical Society of Australia Guidelines and Standards).⁴

Where to start

1. Read the following before starting the DUE:
 - Best practice criteria for the use of laxatives (p 5)
 - Best practice: management of constipation in older adults (also available from www.joannabriggs.edu.au).
2. Follow the steps in each phase of the DUE cycle described on pages 11–13.

DUE is a cyclical process with a number of phases. It is most effective if all phases in the cycle are completed sequentially, rather than separate activities being performed in isolation.¹

Professional development

This activity is recognised by a number of health professional bodies as contributing to continuing education and professional development. To be eligible for professional development points you must provide your details on the DUE access page on the NPS website, including your professional membership number (where relevant). If you did not do so before downloading this kit, please call Aine Heaney at the NPS on 02 8217 8700.

You must notify NPS that you have completed this activity by submitting the evaluation survey 'What did you think of the DUE?' on the NPS website www.nps.org.au/DUE.

Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA)

This activity is recognised under the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) Continuing Professional Development and Practice Improvement (CPD&PI) Program (recognition number CX09 0011e). Registered pharmacists who are PSA members are eligible for 25 CPD&PI points per year of the DUE.

Australian Association of Consultant Pharmacy (AACCP)

This activity is recognised for 25 credit points per year of the DUE.

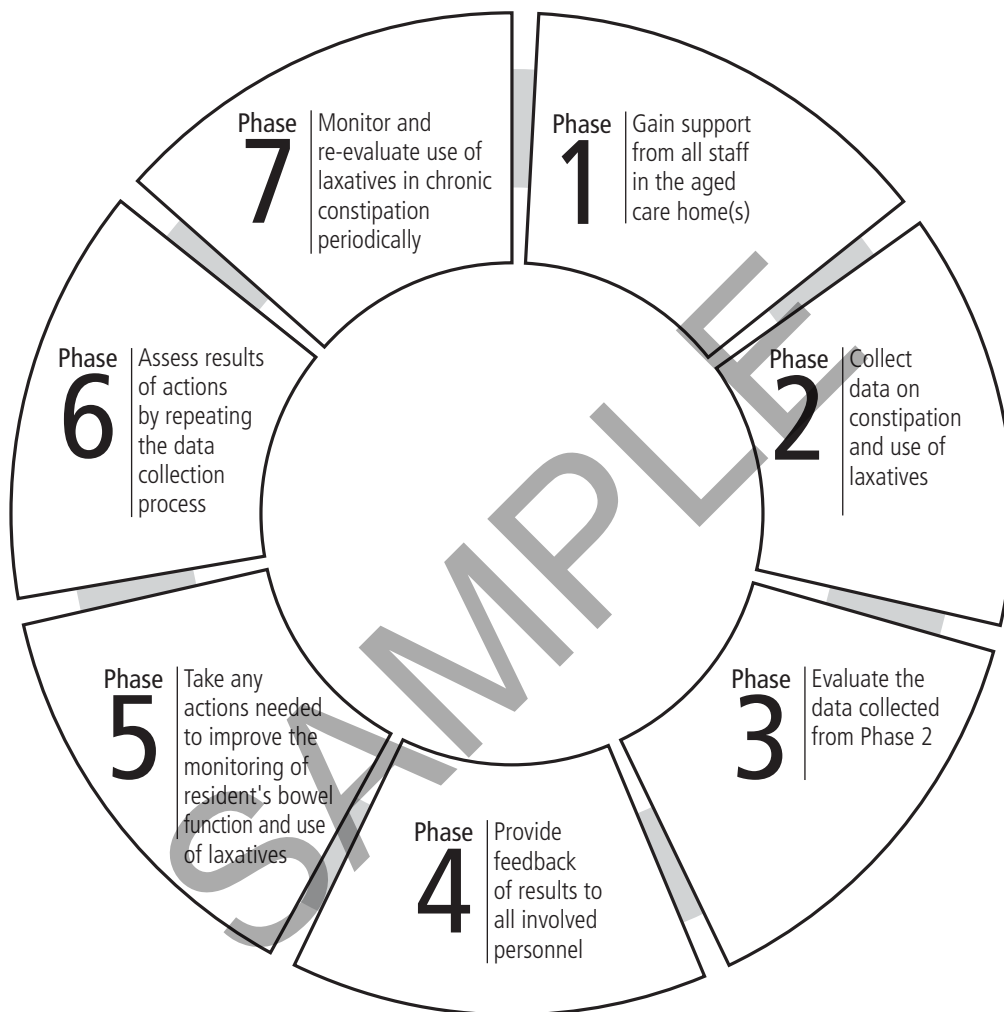
Royal College of Nursing, Australia (RCNA)

This activity has been endorsed by APEC number 061110344 on behalf of Royal College of Nursing, Australia according to approved criteria, and attracts 15 Continuing Nurse Education points.



DUE: A phased approach

(Adapted from the Australian Drug Usage Evaluation Starter Kit¹)



Helpful hints¹

- The DUE process involves cooperation, coordination and consideration.
- Good public relations will minimise antagonism.
- Avoid personal bias in determining actual patterns of use.
- Avoid a 'Pass/Fail' method of evaluation to prevent a defensive attitude among practitioners.
- Present facts and suggested modifications with supporting evidence.
- Present data that do not openly identify a 'guilty' individual.
- Use personal contacts to promote the protocol you are suggesting

Why do a DUE of laxative use in your aged care home?

Constipation is common in the institutionalised elderly with up to half of nursing home residents reported to experience this condition and 74% receiving at least one laxative preparation.⁵⁻⁷ Although often dismissed as a trivial problem the inappropriate treatment of constipation can have a significant impact on quality of life.⁸

The increased incidence of constipation in older people is multi-factorial and reasons can include side effects of medicines, reduced mobility, reduced intake of fibre rich food and co-existing medical conditions. Prevention is better than cure so it is recommended that all residents be screened for altered bowel habit routinely and that advice about hydration and a good diet with fibre be provided.⁹

Laxatives are among the drugs most commonly prescribed in long-term care facilities.¹⁰ Yet despite their widespread use and the firm belief many residents have in their benefits, it is often difficult to assess the efficacy of such therapy. This DUE can be used to ascertain if current practice is at odds with best practice.

There are a number of studies that also indicate that the inappropriate management of constipation can significantly increase the cost of care because of the staff time involved and the cost of supplies.^{11,12} The choice of laxative should be determined by the presenting symptoms, nature of the complaint, patient acceptability and cost.

Best practice criteria are stated standards that are fulfilled when drug use is optimal i.e. the way things should be done in your aged care home (which may differ from current practice). Criteria used to define the most appropriate practice should be based on the most current and sound evidence.^{13,14}

Below are a set of best practice criteria based on current evidence for laxative use in the elderly. You may need to modify these so that they suit the needs in your aged care home. Evidence for these criteria is discussed on pages 6–10.

Summary of best practice criteria

- Systematic and ongoing assessment of bowel habit is the key to good management.
- Review for reversible causes of constipation including medication.
- Take a stepwise approach to the management of constipation, starting with diet and lifestyle factors.
- Select a laxative based on the presenting symptoms and what is appropriate for the resident.
- Monitor bowel function and periodically reassess the ongoing need for laxatives