

<Facility letterhead>

Are You Sure Your Loved One Has A UTI?

How Taking Antibiotics When They Are Not Needed Can Cause More Harm Than Good

At <Facility Name>, our goal is to provide the best care possible. We believe in working together with our Residents and families so you feel we are meeting the needs of your loved one. In this spirit we are writing to share new findings about antibiotic resistance and urinary tract infection (UTI).

Today there is national and world-wide attention focused on antibiotic resistance and its root cause – unnecessary use of antibiotics. One of the most frequent reasons seniors are given antibiotics is UTI. Yet studies are showing that many of these UTI's are misdiagnosed – a result of confusion between normal resident bacteria and those causing infection.

It turns out there are many bacteria living in and on our bodies that cause no harm. In fact these bacteria – which outnumber our human cells 10-to-1 – are needed for us to live, digest our food and have our immune systems function properly. Some of these bacteria live naturally in the bladder without causing any pain or symptoms. This is called *asymptomatic bacteriuria*, which can be present in half or more of seniors living in long-term care settings.

In the past when a urine specimen tested positive for bacteria – even when no symptoms were present – doctors were taught to treat this bacteriuria with antibiotics – just in case they might eliminate the cause of any future problems. We now know this is unnecessary and often harmful. Multiple studies have shown that giving antibiotics in this situation does not help. It does not prevent UTIs or urinary sepsis. It does not improve bladder control. It does not help memory problems or balance. In fact the main result of treating asymptomatic patients with antibiotics is complications. Antibiotics here can kill “friendly” bacteria leading to vaginal yeast overgrowth or severe diarrhea from overgrowth of toxic bacteria in the bowel. Yet the most sinister unseen complication is the emergence of resistant bacteria. Their resistance is the result of repeated cycles of antibiotic treatment. These resistant bacteria have come to predominate in our world – now a global public health emergency more important than AIDS or Ebola virus.

As a family member you are an important care partner for your loved one. By understanding the risks of using antibiotics when not needed you help us to provide good, safe care. Antibiotics should be used only when the doctor or nurse practitioner is sure that there is an infection. We no longer use antibiotics just-in-case. When antibiotics are prescribed or not prescribed, we want you to feel comfortable asking questions.

The safest care happens when the entire team understands and follows the most current recommendations. If you would like more information please ask one of our nurses for the <Facility Name> packet on Antibiotics and UTI.