What's the point
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The practice of covert drug administration in food and beverages is well known in residential and nursing homes, but no prevalence rates exist.

No information is available on which patients are particularly subjected to covert administration or on the procedures for documenting the practice.

In Norway, 11% of patients in regular nursing home units and 17% of patients in special care units for dementia were covertly administered drugs at least once, and in 95% the practice was routine.

Patients with severe cognitive impairment, reduced function in activities of daily living, or aggressive behaviour were more often subjected to covert administration.

The practice of covert drug administration was poorly documented in the patients' records.

Who takes the decision?
We are concerned that the physician responsible for medical treatment in nursing homes is not involved in all cases in which it is decided to give drugs covertly. We believe that such involvement would reduce the frequency of the practice, or at least that the practice would be better documented. A Swedish study showed that the quality assurance of drug administration was positively associated with the quality of the communication between the physician and the nurses, and was higher in nursing homes where discussions about drug treatment took place in the multidisciplinary team.

Nygaard et al have reported that in nursing homes where treatment took place in the multidisciplinary team, patients with severe cognitive impairment, reduced function in activities of daily living, or aggressive behaviour were more often subjected to covert administration.

The practice of covert drug administration in food and beverages may in many cases be the only way of administering the drugs, because of the non-cooperation of patients who may lack the capacity to understand and give consent to drug treatment.

Conclusion
The practice of mixing drugs in patients' food and beverages is common in Norwegian nursing homes but is poorly documented in the patients' records. The procedure for the decision to hide drugs seems to be arbitrary.

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What is already known on this topic
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What this study adds
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