Safe Storage and Disposal of Opioid Medication

Proper storage and disposal of opioid medication saves lives and protects the environment. The majority of people misusing opioid medications get them from family and friends. This is illegal and may be deadly.

Patient education guidelines:

1. **Talk to your patient!** All patients discharged with an opioid prescription should receive instructions on safe storage and disposal. This helps reduce the potential for others to accidentally or intentionally misuse the medication.

2. **Remind patients to keep medication out of sight, lock them up!**
   - Keep in original bottle with cap tightly closed
   - Keep away from heat, light and moisture
   - Keep away from children and pets
   - Good places to store medicines include:
     - A safe or other locked box or locked drawer
     - Top shelf of a hallway or bedroom closet
     - Top shelf of a kitchen cabinet furthest away from stove
   - Do NOT store medication in the bathroom medicine cabinet, above the stove, or in a hot car

3. **Urge patients to get rid of extra medications!**
   - Always get rid of expired, unwanted or unused medicine as soon as possible
   - Do NOT share your medicine with anyone
   - Talk to your pharmacist or call the local police station about how to get rid of extra medications
   - Call 1-800-882-9539 to find an authorized collection site in your community.
   - Look for national drug take back days where you can bring your unused medications
1. Where can patients find information on drug take back locations?
   - Contact local pharmacy or police station
   - Check the Dose of Reality drug take back location interactive map. Enter zip code and distance; result is printable. https://doseofrealitywi.gov/drug-takeback/find-a-take-back-location/
   - Call the DEA Office of Diversion Control 1-800-882-9539

2. What can and cannot be disposed of at drug collection sites?
   - CAN dispose of prescription and OTC medications, vitamins, veterinary medications, ointments and lotions
   - CANNOT dispose of needles (sharps), thermometers, bloody or infectious waste, aerosol cans and inhalers.
   - Disposal of liquid medication varies by site; check with local collection site for guidelines.

3. What if no take back programs or drug collection sites are immediately available?
   Medication take back programs are the preferred way to dispose of opioid medications. If no take back programs or collection sites are immediately available, instruct patients to follow these guidelines:
   - Check product package insert to see if there are special instructions on disposal.
   - Household trash*: Take medications out of their original container. Mix medications (do not crush tablets or capsules) with an undesirable substance such as dirt, cat litter or used coffee grounds. Put mixture in a container than can be sealed such as an empty margarine tub or sealable bag. Place container in the trash. Remove or cover up all personal information on empty pill container before throwing it in the trash.
   - Mail back programs: Check with local pharmacy if a mail back program is available.

4. Can medications be flushed down the toilet*?
   A small number of medications have instructions to immediately flush down the toilet when no longer needed because they are especially harmful and, in some cases, fatal with just one dose if used by someone other than whom it was prescribed for. The FDA website listed below has a list of medications recommended for flushing when drug take back options are not available. When in doubt, patients should check with their local pharmacy.

* Based on FDA and DEA guidelines

Additional Resources

Dose of Reality

For questions, contact:
Peggy Lutz, Service Line Director, Pain Management, Ascension Wisconsin peggy.lutz@ascension.org