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Unwanted Medication Collection Events: The Importance of Proper Disposal

William L. Henderson

Purdue University, whenders@purdue.edu

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UNWANTED MEDICATION COLLECTION EVENTS:

The Importance of Proper Disposal

William Henderson, College of Pharmacy

INTRODUCTION

Still keeping those old, expired medications in your medicine cabinet? We want to know why. Do you know how many unused medications end up in the wrong hands? Did you know that unwanted medications end up in our environment? Do you know how to properly dispose of unwanted medications? The primary objective of this service-learning project was to discover current community practices as well as the barriers related to proper medication disposal. Our goal is to protect the public and the integrity of our environment. The national Healthy People 2020 initiative promotes the collection and analysis of unused medications, followed by environmentally friendly disposal (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).

METHOD

Since 2012, members of the Student National Pharmaceutical Association (SNPhA) at Purdue University have addressed the lack of medication take-back programs and the need for public education by conducting free medication collection events throughout our local community.

Our primary activities consist of collecting prescription and over-the-counter medications, dietary/herbal supplements, and veterinary products from apartment complexes, retirement homes, churches, local businesses, and at public events in Lafayette and West Lafayette. Additionally, we provide educational materials and an opportunity to talk to a pharmacist or pharmacy student.

Figure 1. Student National Pharmaceutical Association President Will Henderson, with Anita Wong, past president, conducting an educational medication collection event.

There is a tremendous amount of organization of people and resources that goes into the planning of each event. Some steps include developing and providing educational materials, advertising, recruiting volunteers and community partners, locating appropriate venues, organizing and setting up tables, signs, supplies, and storage containers, collecting and organizing the medications, finding police supervision for the event and transport of the medications, safely packaging the medications, and dismantling the event. Following each event, we analyze the information we collect from participants.

During these events, we survey participants to find out what we need to know to enact change. We determine the types and quantities of drugs returned, how long people have stored their medications before disposing of them, where the medications came from, how they

Figure 2. (Left to right) Purdue students Jocelyn Tao, Miranda Liu, Will Henderson, Alice Wang, and Alejandro Harber.

generally dispose of unwanted drugs, the reason for turning in the medication that day, whether they would pay for this type of service, and what they actually know about proper disposal, environmental harm, and drug diversion. We do not collect any information that would link the patients' identity to what we collect.

IMPACT

The community response to our efforts has been amazing and reinforces the need for these services. The general public clearly wants to learn more about this national problem and how they can help. I have learned how integral pharmacists and student pharmacists are in this effort. We have the knowledge needed to deliver education to the public concerning proper disposal. Additionally, these services provide an opportunity for the more advanced pharmacy students to mentor younger students. We teach them how to research the medications collected and how to provide education to the public. These experiences have been extremely gratifying to me as an advanced student because I see firsthand how we can use our drug knowledge expertise to make a large impact in our community.

Since the initiation of our program, over 5,000 different medications have been collected and disposed of in an environmentally friendly way. This has no doubt

protected the community by preventing instances of drug diversion, accidental poisonings, and environmental harm. Additionally, we have provided education to hundreds of community members about proper disposal techniques, as well as the importance of using medication correctly and adhering to their prescribed therapies. Moreover, we have begun partnering with other organizations in our community that have a vested interest in this topic, such as the local police, the Drug-Free Coalition of Tippecanoe County, local pharmacies, and Lafayette's Meals on Wheels.

CONCLUSION

New federal and statewide legislation recently has passed to provide more assistance and guidance when conducting these events. Pharmacy students are encouraged to address this national problem. In conclusion, I have benefited from this experience in multiple ways. I have grown as a leader, become a better educator and peer mentor, learned more about my community's needs, made important local contacts, protected my environment, and helped to prevent drug diversion. Our organization values these opportunities and will continue to provide these events for the betterment of our community.

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