

TO YOUR HEALTH

Volume 24, Number 7



July 2019

Safe Medication Disposal

by Susan Cusson, NP

Chances are many of us have some expired or unwanted prescriptions in our medicine cabinets. For many years the Bedford Police came to Carleton-Willard Village every three months to pick up leftover prescription medications that were brought to the Clinic for disposal. This was a convenient service and much appreciated by many Residents. As you may know, this option is no longer available. So what is one to do with prescriptions that are no longer needed?



In the past, medications were traditionally flushed down the toilet or poured down the drain. Until recently, even the Environmental Protection Agency allowed health care facilities to dispose of some expired medications through “sewering”. While this is a quick, easy way to dispose of medications, it is not environmentally friendly. Medications that enter the septic systems and wastewater treatment plants eventually get into our groundwater, rivers, ponds and streams. Wastewater treatment facilities are not designed to treat or remove pharmaceuticals from the water. In the midst of the current opioid crisis in this country, the negative impact on the environment can seem relatively insignificant. But considering the potential damage to the environment, this can ultimately affect each and every one of us.

Even at low levels, pharmaceuticals found in water can impact fish and other aquatic life.

A 2016 study by the University of Washington found that salmon in the Puget Sound had high levels of contaminants accumulated in their tissues. The contaminants include hormones, opiates, antibiotics and other medicines. Just last May researchers at the Puget Sound Institute found trace amounts of oxycodone and other drugs in the mussels harvested from the Sound.

While the long-term effects of exposure to low levels of medicines and the environment on health is not clear, this problem will likely worsen as the rate of prescribing increases year after year. A study by the Western University College of Pharmacy showed approximately two of every three prescriptions filled go unused. With millions of prescriptions filled each year in the United States alone, that adds up to a staggering amount of unused medication.

Leaving unused medications around the house can lead to inappropriate use. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, each year nearly 60,000 children under the age of five are seen in emergency rooms because of poisonings from unsecured medications. Over two-thirds of people with prescription drug substance abuse disorders acquired their drugs by taking them from friends or relatives without their permission.

Safe disposal of leftover prescription medication helps to protect the environment as well as decreasing the risk of drug diversion, accidental poisonings, overdoses and death.

Safe disposal can be accomplished in a number of ways. For those able to get to the police station at 2 Mudge Way in Bedford, there is a drop box for unwanted prescriptions that is accessible 24 hours a day just outside the main entrance. Medications brought to this type of site are typically incinerated.

If you are unable to access a drop off box, there is a way to dispose of medications safely right at home. First, to render medications unusable, mix the medicines (do not crush tablets or capsules) with an unpalatable substance such as dirt, cat litter, or used coffee grounds. Then place the mixture in a sealable container and throw the sealed container away in your household trash. Before throwing out your empty pill bottle or other empty medicine packaging, remember to scratch out all personal information on the prescription label to make it unreadable.

There is also company called DisposeRx that has developed a safe and convenient product to use at home. DisposeRx packets contain a blend of solidifying materials designed to neutralize medication. This is an easy to use solution for safe, ecofriendly disposal of unwanted prescription drugs. The Bedford Police have samples of DisposeRx available at the station. They also generously provided CWV Clinic with some samples for Residents to use. More information about this product can be found on the website DisposeRx.com.



DisposeRx
Solving the problem of drug disposal

SCHEDULE CHANGE for AUDIOLOGIST

Starting this month, Dr. Lou Femino will be in the Clinic the **1st and 3rd Mondays** of each month. Dr. Femino is available from 9:00am-11:30am by appointment and 11:30am-12:30pm for walk in service for batteries only. Please call the Clinic if you would like to schedule an appointment or have any questions.



ANNOUNCEMENT New Physician

We are sad to report that Dr. Elissa Stecker will not be returning to Carleton-Willard Village after her maternity leave. We are happy to announce a new physician will be joining us in August. Dr. Songprod Jonathan Lorgunpai is a geriatrician who has recently joined the geriatrics practice at Mt. Auburn Hospital. A welcome reception will be held on Friday, July 19 from 2-3pm in the Nursing Center Library on Willard Hall and 3-4pm in Auditorium Center. Please stop by to say hello and welcome Dr. Lorgunpai to Carleton-Willard Village.

