



Snohomish County Partnership for Secure Medicine Disposal

Date: June 2011
To: Medical Professionals
From: Snohomish County Partnership for Secure Medicine Disposal
Re: Proper Disposal of Unwanted Meds in Snohomish County

Keeping unwanted and unneeded medicines in homes can pose a risk to your patients and staff, their families and our community. We are pleased to share the enclosed information about an innovative multi-agency program—the Snohomish County Partnership for Secure Medicine Disposal. In light of recent mixed messages and confusion about proper disposal, and even some disposal instructions that have the potential to be dangerous, we are also providing information about proper disposal options for unneeded household medications.

In Snohomish County, disposal of unwanted pharmaceuticals in the solid waste system is not allowed, given that many of them are hazardous waste. Flushing unwanted medicines down the toilet, or throwing them in the trash, are no longer proper disposal methods. Pharmaceutical compounds are now showing up in U.S. streams and groundwater. Disposal in the trash can still make them available for illegal use and accidental poisonings of children, pets and wildlife.

Currently, Group Health and a number of Bartell Drugs locations accept unwanted medicines (not including prescribed controlled substances). As of December 1, 2009, all Snohomish County households have been able to dispose of ALL unwanted medicines, including prescribed controlled substances, at 27 law enforcement locations within our county. Until other safe options are available, these are the programs that residents should use to dispose of unwanted meds in Snohomish County.

The Snohomish County Partnership for Secure Medicine Disposal wants your help in getting this information out to your patients, staff, and their families.

We have provided materials to help you, your patients and staff, and their families learn about this important program:

- **Fact sheet** on the back of this letter to learn about the problem and the solutions.
- **Brochures** for you and your staff to read to learn about this program.
- **Posters** for you to post in your office where your patients and staff can see them.
- **Bookmarks** with program information for you to distribute to your patients and staff.

If you would like an additional supply of educational materials, or if you would like to be on our mail list to receive program updates or to receive information regarding proper disposal of your clinic waste, please contact Jonelle Fenton-Wallace at: jfw@snoco.org. To learn more about the program, visit www.snoco.org and search “pharmaceuticals” or call 425-388-3199.

Safe Disposal of Unwanted Household Medicines



June 2011



The Need for Secure, Convenient and Sustainable Medicine Return Opportunities is Great

- Storing unneeded medicines in our homes can increase the risk of accidental poisoning
 - Since 2004 unintentional poisoning deaths have outpaced motor vehicle crashes as the number one cause of unintentional injury death in Snohomish County—80% of those poisoning deaths were due to opioid pain relievers.
- Prescription drug abuse is a serious and growing problem in our communities
 - Almost 11% of 10th graders reported using pain relievers to get “high” in the past 30 days; Washington State data indicates that young adults (18-29 years) accounted for two-thirds of all admissions to substance abuse treatment centers for prescription pain reliever abuse in 2007.
- Disposing of unneeded medicines via flushing or trash disposal is not the solution
 - Wastewater and septic systems are not designed to treat or remove these chemicals; pharmaceuticals have been detected in surface, groundwater and drinking water supplies.
 - Most waste medicines designate as either federally- or state-regulated hazardous waste. Snohomish County ordinances prohibit the disposal of waste medicines into the solid waste system.

Options for Collection and Disposal of Household Medications

- Snohomish County now has more options for proper disposal of meds than nearly anywhere else in the U.S. Snohomish County’s 27 law enforcement-based sites accept controlled substances and other medications. These local sites provide a “back-up” to pharmacy-based programs (such as Snohomish County’s Group Health and Bartell Drug locations, or the mail-back programs beginning to be offered by large pharmacy chains). Currently pharmacy-based programs can only take back non-controlled medications. However, in the long run additional convenient locations are needed that can accept all meds, as well as sustained funding to support law enforcement- and pharmacy-based programs.
- On the federal level, the “Secure and Responsible Drug Disposal Act of 2010” (S. 3397), will allow for changes to the federal Controlled Substances Act. These changes are intended to increase disposal options for controlled substances via convenient, local programs—such as approved pharmacy-based medicine return locations. More information can be found at www.takebackyourmeds.org.
- On the state level, legislation has been introduced in recent sessions to establish long-term sustainable funding to support law enforcement- and pharmacy-based programs throughout the state. Similar legislation is expected in the future.



Law enforcement locations accept all meds, including narcotics.



How Can You Help?

- Provide proper disposal information to your staff, customers or clients.
- Educate yourself on the issue and what is being done to address this serious problem in our community. Information is available at www.takebackyourmeds.org.
- Join our email list to receive the most current updates. Contact Jonelle Fenton-Wallace at the Snohomish County Partnership for Secure Medicine Disposal at jfw@snoco.org.

