Expired Prescription Medications: Are they still good?

Like food, medications also have an expiration date. Dispose all expired and pre-used medications to avoid health complications.

Tag Words: Expired drugs, health complications, drug misuse, and prescription drugs

Authors: Richard Laskay, Pradip Patel, Brandon Bonnette with Julie M. Fagan, Ph.D.

Summary (PP)

Patients are being prescribed drugs to help combat all types of ailments. Many people take so many prescriptions that it is hard to keep track of them. Because of this, medicine cabinets in households all over America are filled with drugs that are either past their expiration date, or drugs that should no longer be taken. In addition, patient’s children have more access than ever to many dangerous prescriptions. We have decided to take action by petitioning the legislature to have a “Clean-Out Your Medicine Cabinet Day”. Hopefully, people will participate and make this world a little bit safer.
The Issue: Expired Prescriptions

Introduction (RL)
Medicines are made by the pharmacy and expiration date has been set by them. Only they know for how long the medicine is effective. If your Advil or Tylenol says it expired on 02/02/2002, what would you do after it expires? Would you reuse it? Discard it? Give it to someone? Or dispose it properly? The proper way to answer this question is discard it properly for your own sake. Disposing medicine in the toilet bowl is not the option since it causes environment pollution. Giving medicine/antibiotic to someone without knowing any side effect is not recommended by doctors. Pre-used and expired medication should be disposed properly before it causes any health complication.

Issue (RL)
Since 1979, federal law has made mandatory law of having expiration date on prescription and over-the-counter medication. Usually all medication expires in 1 to 2 years from the manufacture dates. Using expired medication can cause the health complication, and disposing medication improperly causes environmental problem. Health complication includes accidental poisoning in children, bacterial resistance. Environmental problem includes water pollution, which is harmful for the aquatic animals as well as humans.

Accidental Children poisoning (RL)
Most of the medication defers from age to age. Most of them indicate the dosage for particular age. Some medications are just not made for children. For example, if father has cold and cough, doctor prescribes him the medication which is suitable for this age, and then father does not finish those doses, because he feels better after some dosage. After sometime, his daughter/son becomes sick and has same symptoms as his/her father had in past. Beside going to doctor, he will give same medication to his kids. Then after, the symptoms become more serious and it leads to the high dosage poisoning. Doctor uses low dosage of medication since their immunity is not good as adult. Giving high dosage becomes accidental drug poisoning for kids, so non-used or pre-used medication should be discarded properly to avoid any accidental poisoning in children.

Water pollution:
According the USA today newspaper, prescription was found in drinking water in 24 metropolitan areas from California to New Jersey in 2008. How did prescription drug go to drinking water? Where do they come from? Pharmaceutical industries, hospitals and other medical facilities are obvious sources, but households also contribute a significant share. People often dispose of unused medicines by flushing them down toilets, and human excreta can contain varied incompletely metabolized medicines. These drugs can pass intact through conventional sewage treatment facilities, into waterways, lakes and even aquifers. Further, discarded pharmaceuticals often end up at dumps and land fills, posing a threat to underlying groundwater.

The only risk of using an expired medication relates to the possible lack of its potency. Drugs like nitroglycerin, insulin, liquid antibiotics, and any medications used to treat potentially life-threatening conditions, should be discarded after their expiration date. Any medication that has changed color, looks cloudy, or has a precipitate, should be discarded as well. However, you will
most likely get the same relief from your regular aches and pains by taking Tylenol or Motrin that expired a few months ago, or calm your eczema itch by using old cortisone cream. Just remember to store your medicines in a cool and dry place to assure that they retain their potency for a long time.

Hormonal compounds like estrogen from birth control pills and patches as well as antibiotics have been linked to being flushed by individuals and institutions into sewage, draining largely unchanged and collecting in rivers and streams, then returning in tiny amounts into drinking water. Traces of antibiotics could worsen bacterial resistance while estrogens and other steroids are known to change the reproductive characteristics of fish. Even trace amounts of chemotherapy medications have emerged in tap water and this could be severely detrimental to the unborn babies of pregnant women who drink such water. The long-term impact on human health of medications in our rivers and drinking water is as yet unknown but no one would want to wait to find out. We can all play our part by inquiring on and using pharmacy or state-run programs for the disposal of expired medications instead of sending them down the sink or the toilet bowl.

**Bacterial Resistance**

Many people think that they can use antibiotic when having any kind of infection. People, who are not aware of the affects of the particular antibiotic, should consult doctor before taking. Those people is causing bacterial or viral resistance when taking antibiotic or antiviral agent while do not even know whether it is viral or bacterial infection. For example, one patient is having fever and beside consulting doctor, he/she borrows or uses an old antibiotic by thinking that he/she has bacteria infection. He/she keeps taking that antibiotic for a week and still not feeling well. Then she winds up going to doctor and doctor says to do blood and some other test. Test comes with viral infection in throat and sensitivity comes with resistance of many antibiotics. The reason of causing the bacterial resistance was, he/she kept taking antibiotic by thinking he/she had bacterial infection but tests came with viral infection. So people should not use any pre-used antibiotic without consulting doctor.

Some people are allergic to some antibiotic/prescription drug, so if they take antibiotic during sickness period, person will become more serious if he/she is allergic to that antibiotic. People who are not sure what they allergic of, should consult doctor before taking any medicine.

**Solution to issue:**

Several counties nationwide have sponsored local prescription medication collections. Recently, in Montgomery County Pennslyvannia, they had a collection near a police station where people could drop off their outdated drugs for disposal:

In order to keep teenagers from being tempted to experiment with prescription medications, the DA — in conjunction with local police and county departments — will host the medicine collection program and invite county residents to turn in their unused or outdated drugs for disposal.

Collection sites will be open Saturday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Norristown Police Department, 235 East Airy St., in Norristown; Cheltenham Police Department, 8230 Old York Road, Elkins Park; Pottstown Police Department, 100 East High St., Pottstown; and Souderton Police
Department, 31 West Summit St., in Souderton.

The collection drive also aims to protect the environment and waterways by keeping drugs out of sewers, as is the case when people pour medication down the drain or flush them down a toilet.

If we could get every county in the country to do this, a lot of lives could be saved.

The Service Project:

Our community service project is to have a nation-wide “Clean-Out Your Medicine Cabinet Day”. During this day, people will properly discard all prescriptions medications that are not currently in use or expired. Hopefully, this project will help prevent some of the problems we have previously mentioned. We have sent a letter to Senator Robert Menendez for the state’s support in helping to get this process moving.

References

http://ag.arizona.edu/AZWATER/awr/july00/feature1.htm
http://www.uhs.umich.edu/antibiotics

Appendices

Letter to Legislature:
ricklask@eden.rutgers.edu
ashdip@pegasus.rutgers.edu
bonay07@eden.rutgers.edu
April 14, 2010
Robert Menendez
One Gateway Center, Suite 1100
Newark, NJ 07102
Dear Robert Menendez,

   We are three senior students attending Rutgers University. As part of a project, we have researched the impact of pharmaceutical drugs in the United States. Specifically, we have noticed the dangers of expired drugs in people’s medicine cabinets. Not only is it dangerous to use drugs after they expire, but drug abuse by patient’s children has become a growing concern. Clearly, making any significant reforms to this industry would be an extremely challenging task for students to accomplish. For this reason, we have pushed for a “Clean-Out Your Medicine Cabinet Day”. On this day people will be encouraged to go through their medicine cabinets and take out any prescription drugs either expired or no longer in use.

   We are asking for your help in organizing a “Clean-Out Your Medicine Cabinet Day”. First, we would like to know if it is possible to attain government funds in promoting this event. Second, we would like to know if it is possible for the legislature to help advertise and coordinate this event.
Several counties nationwide have sponsored local prescription medication collections. Recently, in Montgomery County Pennsylvania, they had a collection near a police station where people could drop off their outdated drugs for disposal. Every county in New Jersey needs to start doing this.

Any way you can help us out would be beneficial to both us and the community. We would like to thank you for your time, and we hope to hear back from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Richard Laskay, Pradip Patel, and Brandon Bonnette

Important: The cover letter was a project for Ethics in Science; a class at Rutgers University. The professor is:
Dr. Julie Fagan
fagan@rci.rutgers.edu

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Editorials

Richard Laskay
4/7/10
Editorial

Throw Away the Pills

Prescription drug usage, in the United States, is at its highest rate ever. Many people are currently prescribed to more than ten different medications. Furthermore, medicine cabinets all over the country are filled with prescriptions that are either expired or no longer in use. While there is debate over the necessity for some of these drugs, it is clear that medicine cabinets full of un-needed pills pose a threat to our society.

To begin with, usage of expired pills poses many health risks. First, the drug will most likely not be 100% effective meaning your ailments may not be cured. Second, many people will use the same medication to cure the “same” illness several months later. This poses potential risks because improper usage of anti-bacterial drugs could increase the bacteria’s resistance to the drug rendering it ineffective.

Another problem with having too many prescription drugs in the medicine cabinets is that they are usually easily accessible to children. Prescription drug abuse by minors has become a growing concern in the United States. Often children are unaware of the consequences of using these medications, and the implications can be life-threatening.
Discarding prescription medications is not as easy as throwing them in the garbage or flushing them down the toilet. Drugs discarded improperly are extremely harmful to the environment. Studies have shown that there are trace amounts of drugs in most people’s drinking water. Most pharmacies have a place where prescriptions can be returned and discarded safely. Taking a few minutes to clean out your medicine cabinet once a year could prevent unnecessary accidents from occurring.

Obviously, prescription drugs will continue to play an increasing role in our society. However, it is important for people to understand the problems that these drugs can have. Once a prescription is over, the necessary discarding procedures should be taken. Discarding un-needed pills from medicine cabinets will make our society safer and better.

Brandon Bonnette

Preventative Medicine, The Power of Healing from Within.

The health outlook of our nation’s people, is dismal at best. We must begin to change the tide of the growing epidemic of contemporary diseases. Preventative Medicine, exists when an individual takes on personal responsibility for their overall health and wellbeing through leading a balanced lifestyle, and makes a conscious approach towards maintaining the best possible quality of life for themselves. To help promote awareness of healthy lifestyle choices, education is a major factor affecting the decision making of individuals on a daily basis. Through educating younger kids as well as adults in the routines of healthy decision making, we attempt to combat the growing epidemic that is our nation’s failing health.

The Sickcare System: A brief look at our nation’s healthcare.

Mainstream healthcare in America today actually has very little basis on “health” and “caring.” Healthcare in America is in fact big business and is run based upon “medical myth” by those who seek to profit from the continuation of illness and disease. That being said it is important that the people of America be conscious of these “lies” that our healthcare system promotes, and what powers we have individually to control our own health and wellbeing.

America’s familiarity with pharmaceutical drugs is no secret. Big Pharma, is a multi-billion dollar business, yes business, which like all other businesses seeks to make increasingly more money. The problem with this is to do so, countless more people will join the army of medicated Americans. Statistics point out that the average American adult has at least 4 pharmaceuticals to their name. This idea of peddling pharmaceuticals as if they are essential to the assurance and maintenance of a quality lifestyle is ludicrous. The pharmaceutical industry has now begun to focus on treating healthy individuals with drugs as if they were essential like vitamins and minerals to the prevention of disease. People must realize that Big Pharma, is not looking out for your best interest and pharmaceuticals are not required for the maintenance of health.

Western Medicine, does not promote the prevention of disease rather the intervention, once sickness has already been acquired. The idea that that illness and disease occur spontaneously within the body is a myth. The chronic diseases that plague our nation are almost all a result of poor lifestyle choices, most of which have to do with our nutritional ignorance, exposure to toxic chemicals, lack of sunlight and physical activity. As people, we must begin to take self responsibility for our own health and educate ourselves in principle of sound nutrition, and healthy lifestyle choices.
Prevention of disease, begins with nutrition and the right choices we can make on a daily basis to maximize our quality of life, while maintaining health. Education of the public about proper nutritional choices, such as natural food products over processed, as well as the avoidance of certain additive ingredients (MSG, partially-hydrogenated oils, aspartame etc.) found commonly within many food products, will help to combat the masses of Americans that have illnesses related to poor dietary choices. Americans will eat just about anything, so long as it tastes good. However, few stop to think that the food we ingest is to not only satiate our appetite but also to help provide our body with the vital nutrients needed to sustain our body’s constant metabolic functioning. Proper dietary choices can go a long way towards the prevention of disease as well as the promotion of good health. Americans must come to the realization that our food whether we know it or not is a source of medicine, the world’s oldest and natural form, in fact.

American’s have a misguided, reliance on doctors to know exactly what is right for us, and how to attain an optimal quality of life. Doctors are not well versed in nutrition or physical exercise two, lifestyle choices that can fundamentally alter the health and wellbeing of an individual. Doctors are trained in treating illness and disease, yet prevention as mentioned before is the key to optimal health.

Our bodies were designed to move. Unfortunately many Americans have gone against our intrinsic need for physical activity and all but avoid any form of physical exertion. Physical activity and exercise are linked to the decrease in prevalence of many common chronic illness that exist in America, yet people still seem to overlook this fact. Just as people know that eating an apple is better than a twinkie, people tend to opt for personal pleasure and satisfaction even if it means, that their decision could and will affect their quality of life. People must learn to focus on activities of personal enjoyment that involve even moderate amounts of movement and physical exertion. Simple lifestyle changes such as walking instead of riding the escalator, or shoveling the walk instead of snow-blowing it can do much in the way of turning the tide in our nation’s dismal health.

Moderation, as is often said, is essential and applicable to all aspects of our life. America’s failing health is not going to be turned around in a day, yet gradually over time. People must learn to make the right lifestyle choices that enhance their quality of life, by promoting health and wellbeing. If there are only a few points to take from this they are, food is medicine, treat it as such; physical health incorporates a dynamic, active lifestyle; sunlight is vital to health; pharmaceuticals do not prevent disease. Americans can take control of their own health, and it starts with making the right lifestyle choices. By taking it one day at a time, one decision from the next, we can change the health of this nation.
Do not flush away expired drugs

It has happened to all of us. We reach into our medicine cabinets and grab the pill bottle and open it as quickly as we can. Sometime later we notice that the drugs are past the expiration date on the bottle and we wonder "should I throw the rest of them out?" Most of us do not even notice the expiration date on the bottle and we are probably taking expired medication. Is that dangerous? Should we really just throw away medication after it has expired? If those medication needs to be thrown away then where they should be thrown?

Do not flush away medication in the toilet bowl. Everyone has old, expired medication hanging around their bathroom cabinet or the cupboard above the stove where we store our medications to keep them safe from children and pets. It is definitely a good idea to clean out your medicine cabinet once a year to get rid of those old medications. The fact is that expired medications often lose their effectiveness, and some may even have the opposite effect of being harmful once they have expired. So what do you do with those expired medications? I was appalled to find that many websites suggested flushing them down the toilet as a way to safely dispose of them. This is definitely NOT correct.

Throwing medication produces the water pollution. The medication you throw in the toilet bowl, it comes back to your drinking water. Most of medication can filter through water treatment plant. When you throw medications into toilet bowl, they go through sewage treatment plant and then treated water is disposed into lake or river. Then lake or river water goes again through drinking water treatment plant. Even though water passes through two different treatments, some steroids, insulin or some other type of medication comes through filtration.

No doctor or pharmacist tells you to throw away your expired medication into toilet bowl. Do not believe any site that tells you how to get rid of your expired medication. Take your expired medication to nearest pharmacy store and have them dispose your expired drugs. Save environment and protect yourself by not polluting water.