*One of the goals of the Parish Health Team is to provide education that will promote safety and well-informed health care decisions. This article is the first of what we hope will be a regular series in The Mountain. We welcome your feedback and ideas for future topics!*

**Getting Rid of Medications No Longer Needed!**

Holding on to medications no longer being taken can lead to medication errors, accidental poisonings, and overdoses. You should regularly go through your medications to remove those that have expired, been discontinued or no longer needed, or the dose is now different.

While it may be easy to part with medications that caused an adverse effect or did not produce the desired effect; it is often tempting to keep leftover antibiotics and pain meds in case they are needed at a future time. Antibiotic resistance has become a significant problem and failing to complete a prescribed course of treatment can contribute. So, I hope this is not the reason you have left over antibiotics! We have learned from the opioid crisis that it is much safer for us and our loved ones to get rid of leftover pain meds. This is one very simple way we can do our part to help prevent abuse.

The desire to decrease accessibility to opioids has also generated more options than ever for disposing of *any* drug no longer needed. The list below is from the FDA website. Information specific to the Knoxville area has been added. Also, be sure to remove or obscure any personal information from the label before throwing away the packaging.

1. **Prescription Take Back Days** – medications may be turned in at an advertised location to medical and/or law enforcement individuals for safe disposal. Spring and fall DEA sponsored national events are held, with additional local events throughout the year. The next National Take-Back Day is scheduled for October 27, 10am – 2pm, at Food City located at 4805 N. Broadway.
2. **Secure kiosks/drop boxes** – locations exist throughout the city where you can walk in and drop the medications in a locked box. (Will not accept needles and aerosol canisters/inhalers.) A service is used to pick up and destroy the medications, by incineration, with strict procedures in place to comply with DEA guidelines. Drop boxes can be found at:

Knoxville Police Department just inside Safety Building’s lobby

Belew Drugs at 2021 N. Broadway, 8622 Asheville Highway, and 5908 Washington Pike

CVS at 6005 Kingston Pike and 417 Emory Road (24 hr. locations)

University Pharmacy inside UT Medical Center

Walgreens at 2400 N. Broadway, 5006 N. Broadway, 4001 Chapman Highway, 121 N. Northshore Drive, and 9200 Middlebrook Pike

1. **Mail to disposal facility** – some pharmacies (Costco) sell postage paid envelopes for mailing meds to be disposed; however, controlled substances are excluded.
2. **Household trash** **(to be used only when above methods are not readily available)** –since pills and capsules can be fished out, (by animals or people) crush or empty them and mix with an unappealing substance like coffee grounds, kitty litter, or dirt. Then place in a closed container like a zip-lock bag or butter tub to prevent it from spilling out. Walmart now provides a powder packet (Dispose Rx) with any new Schedule II opioid prescription to assist with disposal. Add warm water and the powder to the pill bottle, which then forms a biodegradable gel around the pills, before placing in the trash.
3. **Flushing down the toilet or sink (to be used only if unable to access a drop box in a timely manner)** – Because of the risks associated with opioids, the FDA offers this as the quickest and most convenient way to remove them from the home. A list of 15 drugs that may be disposed of in this manner appears on their website. However, there is growing concern for how this, and disposing of meds in household trash, might affect water supplies. The EPA website now recommends disposing of all meds in the secure drop boxes. Increased availability at convenient locations makes this much easier to accomplish.

Remember, it’s not just about removing opioids. Any medication that is no longer needed has the potential to create a medication misadventure that could have been avoided!

Submitted by Vicky Shelton, D.Ph.

Member of CSUMC Parish Health Team