A new home for old drugs

By ACSH Staff — April 25, 2012

Prescription drug abuse is the fastest growing drug problem in the U.S., according to the CDC, which is why the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the American Medical Association (AMA) want you to take advantage of National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day [1], this April 28 from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.

This program, which occurs periodically throughout the year, allows people to drop off their unused or expired medications at special collection sites where the drugs will be dealt with safely. Last October, the DEA took in almost 200 tons of such unwanted medications.

While ACSH certainly supports the latest efforts, Dr. Elizabeth Whelan doesn’t believe such initiatives will make significant strides towards promoting safe drug disposal on a more day-to-day basis. It seems that AMA President Dr. Peter W. Carmel agrees: The DEA hosts events like this to retrieve unused prescription drugs, but there is no place for people to return unused drugs safely and legally all year. The AMA supports legislation that would address this issue, as it is an important part of the overall strategy for combating prescription drug abuse.

ACSH’s Dr. Josh Bloom points out that there are actually two different problems. It’s not that people are abusing certain classes of drugs like antibiotics, he says. They just don’t know how to dispose of them properly. On the other hand, it is the opiates such as hydrocodone (Vicodin) and oxycodone (Percocet, OxyContin) that are actually being abused. But I suspect that people will be much less likely to turn these in.

For now, however, toss out those old and unwanted medicine bottles this Saturday by finding your nearest collection site here [2].

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