

Disposing of unwanted drugs anytime

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Wyoming Medical Center and the Casper Police Department have teamed up to provide a permanent solution to what pharmacist Patti Nelson calls a permanent problem.

Many people, including her own family members, do not know what to do with expired or unused medications, Nelson said. They know it is not safe to throw them in the trash or dump them in the toilet but struggle to find an alternative.

The hospital pharmacist began a prescription drug take-back program in 2007 but only held collection drives twice a year.

Starting Wednesday, people can bring their unwanted ointments, liquids, prescription drugs or over-the-counter medications to the lobby of the Casper Police Department at 200 N. David St. anytime. The police department installed a large green deposit box with double locks to collect medications.

"They won't have to wait until I do my program twice a year," Nelson said. "They have an opportunity to do this whenever is convenient for them."

Nelson along with an officer will pick up the medications and dispose of them in the hospital incinerator.

"Putting drugs where we used to put them -- in the trash it goes to the landfill, down the toilet it gets in the water supply-- is not the thing to do," Nelson said. "We are a lot greener now."

Recent research shows throwing pills in the garbage can eventually contaminate the water and water treatment facilities cannot filter out all medications, Nelson said.

The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy is promoting programs like Nelson's.

Nelson said the program was extremely popular even with limited collection dates. Since 2007, the take-back program has collected 1,342 pounds of medications.

"That's a lot of pills," Nelson said. "Pills weigh milligrams."

People always need medications and have leftover pills, Nelson said, whether the medication expires before it is used or it causes an allergic reaction with the patient.

Police Chief Tom Pagel jumped at the opportunity to expand this program, Nelson said, and teaming up with law enforcement allows the hospital to collect all drugs, including controlled substances.

However, people cannot place used needles or syringes in the drop box, but they can bring them to the hospital to destroy.

Nelson asks people to leave labels on medications.

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