



4g. *How to*: Safely dispose of Medication waste

Why is it important?

The dental team is aware of the need to reduce antibiotic prescribing in line with the growing resistance to antibiotics. Along with antibiotic resistance there is also a growing environmental problem of other pharmaceutical residues entering the environment through improper disposal. Patients not only excrete by-products of medication, but many also dispose of medicines in toilets or sinks. Dissolved in waste-water these can enter rivers and lakes and pass into the food-chain and may adversely affect animals including humans.

Unused medication is also costing the NHS **£300 million each year**¹. As prescribers of medication, dentists should advise patients on the safe, local recommended method for disposing of unused or expired pharmaceuticals and packaging, by returning them to the dentist for disposal (if the dentist disposes of medication) or more commonly, their pharmacist.

Pharmacies are legally required to accept unwanted medication from patients. There is Government guidance on the safe management of healthcare waste: 'HTM 07-01'.

Respiratory inhalers are particularly polluting because the propellants they contain are powerful greenhouse gases - consider collecting used inhalers for recycling, or signposting the local recycling points for your patients, for example via the **GSK 'Complete the Cycle'** recycling and recovery scheme.²



What does sustainable practice look like?

Modelled example

Josh is a practice manager at a mixed NHS/dental practice. His practice has recently reviewed how they dispose of waste medication and Josh has been appointed the lead person to go to for information or advice regarding this.

He has liaised with 3 local pharmacies and information on safe disposal of medication is now clearly displayed on the practice notice board for patients and staff.

Stock is checked each week by the practice dental nursing staff to ensure that medications are used within their time window. This involves a look into the drawers containing dental materials and checking each for the expiry date. Any materials to be used first are placed towards the front of the drawers. Any out-of-date stock is removed and placed in a dedicated box for disposal of medication and expired dental materials.

¹<http://www.medicinewaste.com/help>

²<http://uk.gsk.com/en-gb/responsibility/our-planet/complete-the-cycle/>



Actions

KEY:

Implementation: Easy = 😊😊😊 Less Easy = 😊

Investment Cost: Low = 💰 High = 💰💰💰

Financial return on Investment (ROI): Low = 🐷 High = 🐷🐷🐷

Environmental benefit: Small = 🌍 Large = 🌍🌍🌍

- Audit stock monthly to ensure medications are used by their expiry dates 😊😊💰🐷🐷🌍🌍🌍
- Contact local pharmacies regarding their disposal of medications and whether they offer this to patients 😊💰🐷🌍🌍
- When prescribing medications, advise patients on disposal 😊😊💰🐷🌍🌍
- Provide a box for patients to return unwanted medications 😊😊💰🐷🌍🌍
- Advertise local inhaler recycling points, or become one! 😊😊😊💰🐷🌍🌍🌍
- **Check stock** in your practice regularly to ensure materials and medications are being used by their expiry dates 😊
- **Make contact** with your local pharmacies regarding their recommended way of medication disposal and whether they offer a disposal service for patients to return their unused medication 😊
- **When prescribing medication**, advise patients on the safe, local recommended method for disposing of pharmaceuticals and packaging 😊
- **Consider having a box** in the practice for staff and patients to dispose of unused medication, which you could take to the pharmacy/disposal service regularly 🌍



Resources

Disposal of unwanted medicines information:

<https://psnc.org.uk/services-commissioning/essential-services/disposal-of-unwanted-medicines/>

Government Guidance: 'Management and disposal of healthcare waste: HTM 07-01':

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-the-safe-management-of-healthcare-waste>

Healthcare waste disposal service:

<https://www.initial.co.uk/pharmaceutical-waste/>

Pharmaceutical Pollution: FAQ. Health Care Without Harm Europe.

<https://noharm-europe.org/content/europe/pharmaceutical-pollution-faqs>

Duane B, Ramasubbu D, Harford S, Steinbach I, Swan J, Croasdale K, Stancliffe R. (in press). Environmental sustainability and waste within the dental practice. British Dental Journal.

Dental Susnet, online network for improving the sustainability of dental services:

<https://networks.sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/dental-susnet>