

Editorial: Clean out your old medications

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Spring is for cleaning house, and in these parts it also is a time for cleaning bathroom cabinets and kitchen shelves of potentially dangerous substances. Project Rx returns Saturday for the eighth time since it started four years ago, and it offers people a wonderful opportunity to dispose of medicine safely.

There are many good reasons not to leave old prescriptions in your home, and there equally good reasons not to dispose of them improperly. Project Rx was started by a number of organizations in an effort to prevent unused or unwanted drugs from falling into the wrong hands or being flushed down a toilet and eventually ending up in our water supply.

Project Rx: A River Remedy is a successful collaboration between different community organizations that share a common goal, as Debbie Nelson, president of DNA Creative Communications, wrote in a Sunday op-ed in *The Greenville News*. This semiannual drug take-back event is free. "Each organization comes to the table for a different reason — be it environmental protection, pharmaceutical education or drug prevention — yet for the same ultimate purpose: to safely dispose of unused medications to keep our community safe and healthy," Nelson wrote.

About 4 billion prescriptions are filled each year in the United States, and it is estimated that about one-third of the medicine that is dispensed isn't used, Project Rx organizers said last year. It's frightening to consider that studies have found pharmaceuticals are present in our nation's waterways. Certain drugs could do ecological damage or hurt fish and wildlife. And a few years ago an Associated Press investigation found that at least 41 million Americans drink water with detectable levels of pharmaceuticals.

Project Rx will be from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at a number of Upstate locations including McAlister Square on Pleasantburg Drive and St. Francis Millennium at 2 Innovation Drive. All the sites can be found online at www.riverremedy.org or by calling (864) 467-4099. The partners for this event include Bon Secours St. Francis Health System, Carolinas Institute for Community Policing, Greenville County Medical Society, Greenville County Sheriff's Office, Greenville Family Partnership, Greenville Technical College, Renewable Water Resources and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

As Nelson wrote earlier this week, "Many people do not realize that pouring medications down the drain can harm the environment and that even trace elements of medicine can disrupt the balance of life in our rivers, lakes and streams."

Consider these numbers that Nelson put forth: The average American fills about 12 prescriptions a year. That is more than 5 million prescriptions just in Greenville County, and this doesn't even include over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, supplements and medications for our pets.

Sometimes those prescriptions are not fully consumed and sit around in a cabinet at home. Sometimes a maintenance drug surpasses its expiration date and you no longer want to use it. Other times the medications belong to a family member who died.

If the drugs are not disposed of properly, they can be used improperly and sometimes with tragic consequences. Think about a curious teenager wanting to experiment with a parent's medication. Or an adult who unknowingly reaches for the wrong prescription bottle. Or even, a family member or in-home visitor who is looking to score to feed an addiction.

The temptation also could be great to get rid of these old medications by flushing them in the toilet or dumping them down the drain. People do that, and this accounts for traces of drugs being found in water supplies as is more and more common around the country. A 2008 study by The Associated Press found pharmaceuticals that included "antibiotics, anti-convulsants, mood stabilizers and sex hormones" in the drinking water supplies of at least 41 million Americans.

There are some rules for participating in Project Rx. Gather all your unwanted or expired prescriptions along with medicine including what is for your pet. Keep everything in its original container and leave the labels identifying the drug. If the pills are individually wrapped, you will need to pop them out, put them in a sealed plastic bag and bring the original box or container. Black out all of your personal information on the label with a dark permanent marker, except the name of the drug. Visit one of the convenient disposal sites.

Project Rx has been hugely successful with its events each spring and fall. More than 8,402 pounds of medications have been collected over the past four years.

Help make this Project Rx a success. Round up your old prescriptions, vitamins and pet medications. Then make sure you drop them off Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at one of the convenient locations in our community.

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