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OPED: PROJECT RX MAKES A BETTER UPSTATE

September 9, 2015



(Photo via Project RX on Facebook.)

OpEd by Carol Reeves:

Project Rx is about more than just keeping unused medication out of Upstate rivers.

It is about protecting lives.

In 2007, the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) reported 24,783 cases of accidental exposure to another person's medication, with approximately 5,000 of these cases involving children six years old or younger. Sadly, these numbers have continued to increase over the years, causing accidental exposure to others' medications to become a major source of unintentional poisonings.

Keeping medications after they have expired or are no longer needed creates an unnecessary health risk, especially in places where children are present. Containers that claim to be child-resistant can still be dangerous to children as one study found that 45 percent of child exposure cases involved medicines stored in "child-resistant" containers.

Specifically, the AAPCC describes the case of a four-year old girl whose grandparents found her unresponsive in her own home. The child was unsuccessfully resuscitated and her autopsy revealed her to have died from an accidental overdose of fentanyl, a strong opioid pain medication. Apparently the child had found a discarded transdermal fentanyl patch and ingested it -- resulting in a fatal overdose of fentanyl. Even one case like this is one too many, although unfortunately, there are many like it, which is why we must all do our part to keep old, out dated, or unused medications out of our homes.

Keeping unused medications in the home is not only a danger to children, but to teens and adults as well. When drug users first try prescription medications, or want a quick and easy high, one of the first places they check are the medicine cabinets of their friends and family. Since many people do not count or keep track of their unwanted medications, it becomes very easy for users to take pills undetected.

Unfortunately, people that abuse opioid painkillers are 40 times more likely to abuse heroin, which is quickly growing in popularity across the United States. In 2013, more than half a million American used heroin, which is nearly a 150 percent increase from 2007. Heroin overdose deaths also almost doubled from 2011 to 2013 with more than 8,200 people dying from heroin overdoses in 2013. You can help cut off drug users' supply by removing unused medication from your home and in turn help save a life.

As responsible community members, we can all do our part to help keep Greenville County healthy and safe by participating in Project Rx, a community drug take-back event. Project Rx is led by Renewable Water Resources (ReWa) and supported by the Greenville County Sheriff's Office, Greenville Technical College, Greenville Family Partnership, Upstate Forever and many other organizations throughout Greenville County.

The Project Rx Coalition works together to provide convenient locations for community members to dispose of their unwanted and outdated medications in order to help eliminate accidental exposures and drug use, as well as keep our water system clean, pure, and healthy. Project Rx will be held on Saturday, September 19 from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. at seven convenient locations: Greenville Tech University Center (McAlister Square), St. Francis Millennium campus, Greenville Health Systems' Greenville Memorial Hospital, Hillcrest Memorial Hospital, Greer Memorial Hospital, Oconee Medical Center, and Laurens County Memorial Hospital. To participate, please mark through all personal information on the front of your unwanted medications before dropping off your prescriptions (please note, we do not accept needles or catheters).

If you are unable to attend Project Rx, please make use of the permanent drug disposal container located at the Greenville County Law Enforcement Center at 4 McGee Street, as well as at the Greer Police Department. The disposal containers do not accept needles or catheters, though they are available 24 hours a day and seven days a week for your convenience. We appreciate your help in making Greenville a healthier place to live.

Learn more about Project Rx at www.ariverremedy.org.

Carol Reeves is the director and chief executive officer of Greenville Family Partnership. Learn more at www.gfpdrugfree.org.



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