

Opinion

Dispose of unused medications

By **DENNIS DYER / Guest Columnist**

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Since we are in an opioid epidemic most people know that there are risks associated with opiate-based painkillers. We know that in the early 2000s the medical system began to increase the use of opioid painkillers. This was due to a movement in the medical system to better address pain in those suffering from various medical problems. Drug companies use aggressive marketing to increase profits. Unfortunately that exposed large numbers of patients to opioid painkillers and fueled the epidemic.

These drugs provided those already using drugs and alcohol a new high. Many of those who became addicted to the pills eventually moved on to heroin use. A few years ago 2,400,000 doses of these painkillers were dispensed by pharmacies in Ashland County alone. Due to lower prescribing by doctors in 2017 the number of doses of opioid painkillers went down by 650 thousand doses to 1.75 million doses last year. That is a reduction of 650,000 doses from the high of 2.4 million. That is down 27 percent. The medication average strength also has being reduced. — Source: OAARS Website.

Many of those filling prescriptions for painkillers only take what they believe they need. In many cases when the pain is manageable they stop taking the pills. The remaining pills are typically stored in the medicine cabinet or a dresser drawer. Some may even be left in a basket on the countertop. My guess is that a third or more are not used for the pain and are then present in the home of the patient. A lot of us will save the medication thinking the pain will return and we will be needing it later. Others just don't want to waste the medication. Many have also heard that they should not flush the medication and that there are environmental issues related to disposal.

This means that there are likely hundreds of thousands of doses of opioid painkillers in the homes of area residents. A considerable number of these medications are diverted for misuse. While the number of prescribed painkillers has gone down, we still have to be concerned about the large amount of unused opioid painkillers in our homes. When you have the medications at home, keep in a safe place where the drugs cannot be stolen.

We can all contribute to reducing the misuse of these drugs by proper disposal. Here is how medication can be disposed of properly:

1) Dispose of in a drop box: Take the medication to the drop boxes at the Ashland County Sherriff's office. There is a drop box in the lobby of the County Jail. There is another box at the Loudonville Police station.

2) Dispose of in the trash: Use an in-home neutralization kit and dispose of in the trash. If you don't have a kit put the medication in a sealable plastic bag. Add something that will make the medication unusable like cat litter or coffee grounds and then put in the trash.

Please encourage your friends and family to dispose of unused medications. One should avoid flushing medication down the toilet.

Dennis Dyer is director of the Ashland County Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse.