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Rochester General starts pilot drug take-back program

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Rochester General Hospital is part of a pilot program on medication take-back. Anyone can drop medication in a secure receptacle or get a pre-paid envelope and mail medication to the company that destroys unwanted drugs. (Photo: Provided by Doug Hosie, Rochester Regional Health)

Once or twice a week, someone at Rochester General Hospital

asks where they can safely get rid of unwanted medication.

“They don’t like flushing it down the drain or putting it in coffee grounds and having it end up at a landfill,” said Doug Hosie, director of pharmacy for Rochester Regional Health. “It just doesn’t seem right.”

As part of Rochester Regional’s sustainability initiative, its flagship hospital is part of a six-month pilot program to reduce the public health and environmental impact of unused prescription and over-the-counter medication.

Patients, medical staff and the public can place the medicine in a secure box in the lobby of the Polisseni Pavilion, or pick up a pre-paid envelope and mail the drugs to a company that handles medical waste.

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The program is covered by a \$83,830 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and administered by two nonprofits, the Product Stewardship Institute in Massachusetts and the [New York Product Stewardship Institute](#).

The goal is to protect the environment and reduce accidental poisonings and drug abuse.

“We’re hoping more to aim toward controlled substances, to keep opioids off the streets,” Hosie said. “When you end up with all these things in your house it becomes an opportunity that doesn’t need to arise.”

[Read: 92 overdoses, 14 fatalities in first month of 2018](#)

Rochester General is one of the five hospitals in the state participating in the pilot, but the only urban one. The others are in rural Delaware, Otsego and St. Lawrence counties. The pilot program also will assess the attitudes of health care providers and patients toward medication disposal, and the information will be used to create an online toolkit for providers across the country.

Hospitals were chosen based on criteria that included their commitment to the environment and the effect of the opioid epidemic in their area, said Vivian Fuhrman, senior associate for policy and programs at the [Product Stewardship Institute](#).

RRH makes green commitment

Under chief executive officer Dr. Eric Bieber, Rochester Regional Health is moving toward greener practices. Last year, the Rochester General parking garage was updated to more efficient LED lighting and the system pledged to get all of its electricity through renewable sources by 2025.

RRH director of sustainability Mike Waller learned about the take-back program through Practice Greenhealth, a national nonprofit that works to make health care more friendly to the environment.

As anyone who has cleaned out a medicine cabinet knows, it's easier to get all those drugs than to get rid of them in a responsible way.

Under current New York law, you can't bring leftovers back to the pharmacy that dispensed the medication. Hospitals need to be registered with the Drug Enforcement Administration in order to be a take-back site. RGH registered as part of the pilot.



Outpatient pharmacies at UR Medicine have places for people to safely get rid of unwanted medication. (Photo: Provided by University of Rochester Medical Center)

The University of Rochester Medical Center registered with the DEA more than a year ago. Anyone can bring unwanted medication to outpatient pharmacies at Strong Memorial and Highland hospitals, Highland South Wedge Pharmacy at 777 S. Clinton Ave. and Strong Ties pharmacy at 2613 West Henrietta Road.

Local law enforcement works with Monroe County Department of Environmental Services on taking back medication. There are drop-off boxes at town police stations and at zone locations of the Monroe County Sheriff's Office. Rochester Police Department does not have any secure sites, according to a spokeswoman.

50 pounds in a week

The pilot program at RGH started Feb. 6 and got off to a fast start.



Doug Hosie, director of pharmacy for Rochester Regional Health (Photo: Provided by Rochester Regional Health)

Hosie said expectations were that RGH would fill two 50-pound boxes a month, but the first filled up in a week.

“Being that it’s so new and we’re probably getting some employees and physicians, I don’t know if that will get more or less,” he said.

The hospital has two doctor office buildings on the campus, and Hosie said physicians are always asking patients to bring medications to their appointments.

“If they say, ‘Oh, you can stop taking this one,’ on the way out you can drop it off in the kiosk,” Hosie said.

Irondequoit Police Chief Richard Tantalo said the mail-in option allows family members to help older relatives who may not be able to get out and dispose of medication.

“It’s certainly a matter of convenience,” Tantalo said. “This way folks can go home and maybe visit someone in their family and secure those unused or outdated medications and get them safely disposed of. I think the more we provide easy access to folks, the more successful we’re going to be in getting these medications safely and properly disposed of.”

What gets collected

New York is considering a law that would require drug manufacturers to run and pay for take-back programs. But right now, companies called reverse distributors provide secure drop boxes, transportation and destruction of materials collected through take-back programs. These companies can make rules that go beyond federal regulations.

The kiosks in the pilot program are being managed by Stericycle, an Illinois company that handles medical and other regulated

waste. The kiosk at RGH does not take needles or other medical sharps. It also does not accept heroin, (LSD), marijuana (cannabis), ecstasy, methaqualone, and peyote, which are [classified as Schedule I by the Drug Enforcement Administration](#).

The kiosk will accept liquids in sealed containers, and Schedule II through V medication. That includes (Vicodin), cocaine, methamphetamine, methadone, (Dilaudid), (Demerol), (OxyContin), fentanyl, Dexedrine, Adderall, and Ritalin.

Hosie said that once the pilot ends, the system will have to pay for the medication to be sent for disposal. He estimated the cost could run between \$200 to \$300 a month.

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Safely get rid of unwanted drugs

Town police and the Monroe County Sheriff's Office have places to safely dispose of medications. Locations are open to all, regardless of where you live. Some locations also accept sharps. Go to www.monroecounty.gov/ecopark/pharmaceutical.php. Call first because some hours may have changed.

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