

## **Help the NHS Save Money**

A lot of drugs prescribed in the NHS are wasted and estimates suggest that these wasted drugs cost the NHS between £300 and £800 million every year. The cost alone of collecting returned unused drugs from community pharmacies and incinerating them is more than £5 million. We all, doctors and patients, have a responsibility to try and reduce this waste. Many people do not realise that returned, used medicines cannot be dispensed to another patient and have to be destroyed, the same applies to dressings and continence pads as well.

The vast majority of the medications involved in this waste are on repeat prescriptions and so this is an area where we must all look to try and help. As many medications are expensive, some costing £100 a month or more, we are advised to prescribe a month at a time so that any changes do not lead to discarded medication. We ask all patients to request only those things that are needed, rather than everything that is on their list. I have been into some homes and found more unused inhalers in the bathroom cupboard than we have on our dispensary shelves! If you order your medication through a pharmacy, please make sure they do not tick everything 'just in case'. If there are any items on your repeat prescription list that have not been used recently, then we try to remove them so that they are not ordered unnecessarily – we can always restart them if they are needed again.

Probably the most important way that we can help reduce this waste is to communicate with one another. At Wye Surgery, we aim to review everybody's repeat prescription at least every year. For most people, this is done by making a routine appointment to be reassessed to see if the medication needs changing (doses altered; number of tablets required or additional treatments) and to see if anything should be discontinued. Use this appointment to ask questions about your medication and arrange the necessary checks; if you are on several medications do not try to add a medication review to a new problem, as it is likely to take up the whole appointment.

Another situation, where medications are dispensed and wasted is during and after hospital admissions. When you go to hospital, take all your medication with you, they now use your medication. If there have been changes to your medication while in hospital, arrange to see your GP or speak with them before ordering your next lot of medication so that you get only the correct items.

We must work together to try and reduce this appalling waste:

- order only those things that you need
- check what you have been given and return anything not needed before you leave the pharmacy/dispensary
- communicate with your GP about what is needed and what is not
- take unused medication to your local pharmacy/dispensary for safe disposal
- attend medication reviews with your doctor when requested to do so

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May 2011