

Project Rx keeps families, water safe

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By Brad Wyche and
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According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, each person in the United States filled an average of 12 prescriptions in 2009. With Greenville County's population of approximately 450,000 people, that means we bring home more than 5 million prescriptions each year, plus millions more bottles of over-the-counter drugs. A lot of the pills in these containers go unused.

Sadly, too many people flush or pour leftover medications down the drain. Even trace amounts of these drugs can disrupt the balance of life in our lakes, rivers and streams. Scientific studies have found that even extremely diluted concentrations of pharmaceutical residues can cause harm to fish, frogs and other aquatic species in the wild. Related research reports that human cells fail to grow normally in the lab when exposed to trace concentrations of certain drugs, raising concerns about the long-term impacts on human health.

Lacking a safe method

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to dispose of medications, many people leave them sitting in the medicine cabinet — out of sight, out of mind. At our first drug take-back event in 2010, we received prescription medication dating from 1969 — 41 years waiting for a solution! The problem with holding on to medications is the potential for them to find their way out of our homes and onto our streets, making our neighborhoods unsafe.

Prescription drug abuse affects a surprising number of families. In fact, every day an estimated 2,500 youth in the United States misuse some form of medication for the first time, often because they believe them to be a "safer" high than illegal drugs. Seventy percent of those who abuse medication report obtaining it from a friend or family member. We must send our youth the message that prescription drugs are unsafe unless they are prescribed by a doctor and that we want them to stay healthy and drug free.

So what can be done? Can we take steps to ad-

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dress and reduce the harmful impacts of these medications on our waterways, our streets, our homes and our community? The answer is yes, and the most effective way to do so is through a community-based initiative.

One year ago, an unconventional collaboration among local organizations took shape around the issue of proper medication disposal. Last Novem-

ber, this collaboration resulted in the first Project Rx: A River Remedy collection event, at which more than 400 pounds of unused medications were collected and disposed of safely. The partners hosting this event included the Greenville County Sheriff's Office, Greenville Family Partnership, Greenville Technical College, Renewable Water Resources and Greenville Safe Communities. Each came to the table for a different reason — be it environmental protection, pharmaceutical education or drug abuse prevention — but for the same ultimate purpose: to safely dispose of unused medications to keep our community safe and healthy.

The collaboration was so successful that the task force decided to make Project Rx a semi-annual event. We have now been joined by additional partners: Bon Secours St. Francis Hospital System, Carolina Institute for Community Policing, Greenville Hospital System, Upstate Forever and Whole Foods Market. Now we are even better equipped to fulfill our

community's need of properly and safely disposing of unused prescriptions and other medications.

The next Project Rx event will take place today. Please join us by collecting your unwanted medications and bringing them to McAlister Square or St. Francis Downtown Hospital between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Spread the word to your family and neighbors, discussing with them the potential harms of not properly disposing of unused medication. For more information, please visit www.ARiverRemedy.org or call Greenville Family Partnership at (864) 467-4099 or Upstate Forever at (864) 250-0500.

The life cycle of medication should end with proper disposal. We need individual support in changing behavior and organizational support in changing policies. With your help, and through awareness, education, and take-back events we can keep our neighborhoods and environment safe from the dangers of prescription and over-the-counter medications.