

Background

The most common source of prescription drugs for non-medical users in the U.S. is friends and families. Specific to opioids, approximately 50-75% obtain the misused pills from family and friends, highlighting the need for prevention strategies increasing the frequency and quantity of unused prescription drug disposal. Leftover pills from adolescents' own prescriptions are the second most common most common source (Ehrhart, Granek, Nielson-Pincus, & Horn, 2020). Permanent drug donation boxes, or drop-boxes, have become a common prevention method used by communities across the United States. The goal of this prevention effort is to reduce the availability of excess of controlled medications. They have been deemed the safest way to dispose of unused or expired medications by the DEA, and most are found outside law enforcement offices and pharmacies.

Summary of Research

Permanent drug take-back boxes are an effective strategy for removing an excess of controlled substances in a community setting. In areas where drop-boxes are the most accessible (rural settings, according to one study), higher rates of controlled substance donation occur (Gray, Hagemeyer, Brooks, & Alamian, 2015). In addition, another study reports that most individuals who have used drug drop-boxes before, indicated that they would help others in their community adopt the same behavior of properly disposing of medication. Likelihood of improperly disposing of drugs, self-medicating, ignoring expiration dates of drugs, and improper storing of drugs is much less likely to occur with access to a permanent drug disposal box (Akici, Aydin, & Kiroglu, 2018). To further increase the effectiveness of drug disposal boxes in communities, it is recommended that more information is given to the public about their locations and advocating for the pharmaceutical industry to provide funding for more disposal boxes in communities (Ehrhart, Granek, Nielson-Pincus, & Horn, 2020). Lastly, few formal studies have been done to evaluate the effectiveness of implementation and cost. Current research of permanent drug donation boxes is limited, and more studies are needed to further explore the effectiveness of this intervention in communities across the country (Schäfer et. al., 2021).

Conclusion

Though studies on the effectiveness of permanent drug donation boxes are limited, current research shows they are an effective intervention in communities. They are recommended for communities to reduce the excess of controlled substances in the area and in homes. In general, when unused prescriptions are properly disposed of, self-medicating is less likely to occur and there is a greater awareness of prescription expiration dates and proper storages. More research would assist in overcoming barriers to participation that are not currently known in addition to allowing for improvements to be made to the intervention itself. Additional studies examining the effects of this intervention on over-dose rates would also be beneficial.

References

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