



## News Articles, Anesthesiology/Pain Medicine, Pharmacology

### Poster created to promote safe storage, disposal of Rx

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Safe storage and disposal of controlled prescription drugs may save a young person's life. It's that simple.

Controlled prescription medications such as opioids, sedatives and stimulants can be used to appropriately treat conditions such as post-operative pain, procedural anxiety and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. However, these medications frequently are prescribed in larger amounts than used, leaving families with addictive medications and little guidance on safe storage or disposal.

About three-quarters of young people who are addicted to heroin have their first opioid exposure through prescription pain pills. Overdose deaths have more than tripled in the past 15 years, and most of these are attributable to opioids, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In addition, child opioid poisonings have increased by two-fold over the past 25 years (Gaither JR, et al. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2016;170:1195-1201, <http://bit.ly/2xHh2JT>).

Control over the opioid faucet could save young lives.

Friends or family members remain the main source of diverted opioid pain medications, according to the [National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#), and teens' own prescription leftovers are an additional source of opioids for nonmedical use (McCabe SE, et al. *J Adolesc Health.* 2013;52:480-485, <http://bit.ly/2yxUH0y>). Many in this age group report they have unsupervised access to their controlled prescription drugs (Ross-Durow PL, et al. *J Adolesc Health.* 2013;53:260-264, <http://bit.ly/2fEhDHL>).

To shine a light on the dangers of opioid diversion and help pediatric providers educate families and caregivers about safe storage and disposal of opioid medications, a poster was created by the AAP Section on Anesthesiology and Pain Medicine, Committee on Drugs and Committee on Substance Use and Prevention. The poster, titled "Medicine Safety for Children and Teens: We All Play a Role," was distributed at the HealthyChildren.org booth at the AAP National Conference & Exhibition in September and raised questions about how pediatric providers can locate and educate families about easy ways to dispose of unused opioids in their community.

Even when prescribing a short course of opioids, it is imperative that families are counseled to keep these medications locked up or away from other members of the family. Parents and caregivers also must be warned of the dangers of stockpiling and sharing unused opioids and other controlled medications (McDonald EM, et al. *Pediatrics.* 2017;139:e20162161, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/139/3/e20162161>).

Safe disposal methods are available in many communities but may be challenging for patients to find. Many pharmacies will take back unused medications, but not all. Police stations, fire stations and sheriff's offices often will take back controlled medications using Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) approved safe boxes. These locations are registered with the DEA and can be found at <https://apps.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch>. In addition, the DEA continues to have National Take Back Days, when families can return medications to other locations.

If no takeback locations are easily accessible, the Food and Drug Administration recommends that opioid medications be flushed down the toilet or placed in a plastic bag with kitty litter, coffee grounds or other unpalatable substances and placed in the trash.

Providing storage and disposal information to parents and patients with every controlled substance prescription can help reinforce the importance of keeping these medications away from children and teens.



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We encourage pediatric providers to email [substanceuse@aap.org](mailto:substanceuse@aap.org) to request a free medication safety poster and information about how to find disposal locations in your community. The poster also is available at <http://bit.ly/2xDfm6q>.

*Dr. Gonzalez is a former member of the AAP Committee on Substance Use and Prevention. Dr. Agarwal is former chair of the AAP Section on Anesthesiology and Pain Medicine Executive Committee. Dr. Houck is a member of the AAP Committee on Drugs.*