

Return Unwanted Medicines



Background of Return Unwanted Medicines (RUM)

Aim of the program

The aim is to remove all unwanted medicines in the community and dispose of them in a safe and environmental appropriate manner. All medicines collected in RUM bins are incinerated at an Environment Protection Authority (EPA) accredited facility – high temperature incineration is the EPA recommended method of disposal of medicines.

Why it's important

Unwanted medicines in the home are a potential hazard to young and old – more than 5000 children were hospitalised last year in Australia because of accidental poisonings in the home (with medicines). It is not only children though; inappropriate dosing of medicines is possible in all ages and can potentially lead to unintended outcomes. In a fact sheet published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in 2015, accidental poisonings were the 15th leading cause of premature deaths between 2010 - 2012. This number had increased by 258% in the previous 10 years.

It is also important that expired medicines are not kept in household medicines cupboard – most will be less than 100% active beyond the expiry date and some may even have unwanted effects.

Additionally, the program's aim is to avoid having unwanted medicines ending up in landfill or our water supply – there is already measurable concentrations of medicines in Sydney Harbour. While there has not been specific research in Australia there has been much studied in the U.S. about this and it has been demonstrated that aquatic life has been adversely effected by medicines in the water.

How it works

Customers return their unwanted and expired medicines to the pharmacy and the pharmacist will put the medicines into the RUM bin. A RUM bin must be kept in a secure area of the pharmacy that is not accessible to the public, and always be supervised by the pharmacist.

RUM bins are ordered from your wholesaler and once full and with the tamper proof lid firmly attached, they are returned to the wholesaler. They are then transported from the wholesaler warehouse to the incineration facility where the intact RUM bin is incinerated.

FAQs

There are many FAQs found on www.returnmed.com.au but questions often asked by pharmacy staff are about what medicines can and can't be put into the RUM bin – below is a table that should help in decision making.

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What medicines RUM bins can safely collect and dispose of

Type of medicines customers can return

RUM bins are not the place to dispose of any unwanted paper prescriptions or other rubbish. It is preferred that all packaging is placed into the appropriate recycling once patient information has been removed.

Suitable for placing in RUM bin	Unacceptable in RUM bin
Oral medicines – tablets, capsules, wafers, etc.	Empty packaging
Mixtures	Unwanted paper prescriptions
Cytotoxic medicines e.g. PBS dispensed quantity	Sharps
Cream, ointments, gels	Used blood testing strips
Nasal sprays, drops	Used injectables
Eye ointments, drops	Household poisons
Ear drops, ointments	Used bandages or dressing
Unused injectables e.g. Fluvax, Clexane	Empty inhalers
Inhalers that still contain active ingredient	Infant formula (open or unopened)
Unused insulin pen fills or pens	Empty medicines organisers e.g. Dosett boxes
Suppositories	Compounded chemotherapy medicines e.g. IV
Pessaries, vaginal creams	
DAAAs partially full or full – without packaging	
Any over the counter medicines	
Chinese medicines	
Herbal medicines	
Complementary medicines, including those prescribed by naturopath	
Veterinary medicines	

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Separate process for sharps or S8 medicines

Each state and territory has Drugs and Poisons Regulations that provide the pharmacist guidance on the correct action to take when disposing of Schedule 8 medicines. Please refer to the protocol for your jurisdiction under the Pharmacist tab on www.returnmed.com.au.

Where the RUM bins are transported to / incineration process

RUM bins are taken to the incineration facilities for destruction – they are incinerated intact – RUM bin and drugs together.

New consumer campaign

Objective of new consumer campaign

The consumer public awareness campaign is to increase awareness of the RUM Project. A general population survey in 2016 revealed that consumer awareness was less than 20%. So, the aim of this campaign is to increase awareness in many different ways – both by traditional media but also by use of social media and to reach the “sandwich generation” (typically the generation, between 30 - 50, who are caring/supporting their aging parent while still bringing up their own family) by many different mediums.

Read, Remove, Return

The campaign is based on:

READ – go to your medicines storage area – read the labels, check the expiry dates, and ask yourself why I have this medicine

REMOVE – take out any expired or no longer required medicines, especially those you can't remember what they were needed for

RETURN – collect them altogether and take these medicines to your local pharmacy for safe disposal

The Audit and Survey Report 2016

This report is available at www.returnmed.com.au and contains a huge amount of useful information. Some of the findings are as follows:

- Top 5 items returned to pharmacy were Paracetamol tablets, Salbutamol inhaler, Glycerol trinitrate spray, Cephalexin capsules and Aspirin 100mg tablets
- Ten of the most frequently found items were in the Top 20 PBS medicines dispensed in 2015
- All top 20 items found in RUM bins were mostly low cost – generally under \$5 per PBS pack
- Returned content breakdown; Schedule 4 (54.6%), Schedule 3 (4.4%), Schedule 2 (9.5%), Schedule 8 (1.4%), Complementary medicines (3.9%), Dose administration aids (14.2%)

There is a summary of the findings on the website as well.

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Staff roles

How can both pharmacists and pharmacy assistants can encourage customers to return unwanted medicines?

Every time you speak with a customer about medicines there is an opportunity to talk about what they should do with any unwanted medicines and tell them about the RUM project – brochures are always available from the RUM office if you would like to order, or you can download them from the RUM website.

Ask your customer if they have any medicines at home that they no longer need. If yes or unsure, encourage them to review their medicine area and bring back any medicines that are expired or they no longer need.

Antibiotics are another perfect opportunity to talk with the customer about appropriate disposal – If they haven't taken the whole course then they should bring them back to the pharmacy for disposal.

Opportunities to engage customers about RUM in pharmacy

Every interaction with a customer probably has an opportunity to encourage them to think about medicines in their home that they may well not need any more.

We know that 60% of those surveyed did have unwanted medicines at home – some of which were expired. We also know that most of these people thought it was safe to put these medicines into the rubbish bin, down the drain or flush them down the toilet.

This is not the correct way; the aim of RUM is to dispose of all medicines in a safe and appropriate manner that will not harm the environment. Any medicines into the rubbish or the water may ultimately end up in our water supply and become potentially harmful to both human and animal.

Just remember that we can never completely prevent medicines (or their breakdown products) from contaminating our water (due to normal excretion in both urine and faeces) but we can help to minimise it.