



Podcast Transcript "Safe Drug Disposal"

Recorded: October 14, 2020

Moderator: Connecticut State Representative Christie Carpino, Eastern Regional Director, Women In Government Board of Directors

Panelist: Irina Butler, MPP, Vice President of Compliance and Operations for the Pharmaceutical Product Stewardship Work Group or (PPSWG)

Voiceover: Welcome to the [Women In Government Podcast](#). Whether discussing important issues or policies of the day, this is the place where lawmakers and decision-makers unite to get the conversation started.

Rep. Christie Carpino: Any medicine can cause harm if not taken properly, or by the wrong person. No one wants to hear about their grandmother taking expired medicine that no longer treats her illness; or worse, having to visit the ER, especially when this could have been prevented.

These days the headlines are focusing on COVID-19, but that does not mean another health issue has vanished -- lack of knowledge on proper use, storage, and disposal of unwanted medicine. It's possible that someone in your life is currently misusing or has misused medicine.

Hello, I'm [Connecticut Representative Christie Carpino](#) and Eastern Regional Director of the [Women In Government Board of Directors](#). Thank you for listening to our latest podcast about safe drug disposal. We'll be discussing some important topics like the proper use, storage, and disposal of all unwanted or expired household medicine -- many of which are not opioids.

Joining the conversation is [Irina Butler](#), MPP, Vice President of Compliance and Operations for the [Pharmaceutical Product Stewardship Work Group](#), or PPSWG. Thank you for taking the time to talk about such an important health issue.

Irina Butler: Thank you for having me today.

Rep. Christie Carpino: I'm glad to be having this conversation with you. I've been working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to get stronger prescription guidelines limiting excess supplies of opioids and increasing patient education and treatment options. This conversation will go a long way. Before we get started, I'd like to thank all of the listeners for taking the time to hear this discussion. Don't forget to subscribe to, like, or share our podcast. You can also email us by visiting womeningovernment.org.

[According to the CDC](#), over the span of almost 10 years, starting back in 1999 almost 450,000 people died from an overdose involving any opioid including prescription and illicit drugs. In recent years, significant attention has been placed on the proper use, storage, and disposal of medication. [National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day](#) is coming up on Saturday, October 24th.



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Irina, can you tell me about the program, how it began, and why it's important for people to mark this day on their calendars?

Irina Butler: Absolutely, and again thank you for the question and for having me join you in this important conversation. You're absolutely right, the [DEA Drug Take-Back Day](#) is so important and such a wonderful opportunity for residents to safely dispose of their medication. As a participant in the DEA drug take-back day personally, I know this firsthand.

Based on the DEA's website, the goal of the DEA drug take-back events are similar to those of [myoldmeds.com](#), the tool that I am thankful to have this opportunity to discuss with you today. They're both centered around education and the importance of disposing any unwanted, unused, or expired medications in the house.

The DEA drug take-back events are a wonderful opportunity for people to go through their medicine cabinets and dispose of old and expired medications. [Myoldmeds.com](#) expands on that biannual drug take-back day and that opportunity and showcases daily the opportunities available for residents to safely dispose of expired household medications.

Rep. Christie Carpino: Take-back days are so important. I've been on hand to highlight these events and help residents in my own community dispose of unused or unwanted prescription medications. This also includes regular medications, not just opioids. In neighborhoods all across the country, I'm fairly certain we would find medicine cabinets full of expired drugs or medications you no longer use. I know old meds lose effectiveness over time and that it's important to make sure they aren't out of date sitting in your home because they aren't healthy for you and your family.

If someone wanted to properly dispose of prescription medicine in a safe way, how would they go about finding a drop off location or kiosk?

Irina Butler: The great thing about [myoldmeds.com](#) is that it's available at your fingertips 365 days a year. You can easily find disposal locations in your area by using [the kiosk locator feature](#), just type in your zip code and interactive map will showcase the disposal locations that are conveniently available in your area. The information that populates will give you all of the information that you could possibly need; where to go, the town of operation, if there are any restrictions in terms of collection. Of course, we always encourage users and residents of this tool to call ahead and ask any additional questions that they may have. However, there are 20000+ locations offering disposal methods, so lots of options for residents to use. We encourage residents to utilize [the myoldmeds.com](#) website year-round to dispose of unwanted or expired medications.

[Myoldmeds.com](#) provides extremely valuable education as well. We talk a lot about safely disposing your medication -- well what does that really mean? [Myoldmeds.com](#) is not only a kiosk finder, it's also an easy-to-read [educational resource](#). When you are ready to dispose of unwanted household medicine,



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it has verified disposal locating and patient information, but it also has so much more. We definitely encourage everyone to go check it out.

Rep. Christie Carpino: What type of unwanted, unused, or expired medicines will be collected? Is there anything sites cannot accept?

Irina Butler: That's a great question. Each site is very different and to learn the specifics myoldmeds.com will have that information, again they get the [kiosk locator](#) for that additional information. We also advise that residents call ahead and ask those specific questions and especially if they have any real specific questions on the type of medicine that they are disposing.

Rep. Christie Carpino: I mean, I appreciate you highlighting the fact that the guidelines in the programs vary depending on where we live, but can you talk a little bit about the proper way to dispose of sharp items like needles? We always want to avoid accidental needle sticks. Can you explain the two-step process for disposing of used sharps?

Irina Butler: You are absolutely right; sharps disposal guidelines and programs vary depending on where you live. I would recommend checking with your local trash removal services or health department. However, the FDA recommends [a two-step process](#) for properly disposing of used needles and/or sharps. Step one would be to place all needles and other sharps and sharps disposal container immediately after they have been used, and then step two would be disposing of that sharps container according to your community guidelines.

Myoldmeds.com also points residents to a wonderful resource I would really recommend, it is the safeneedledisposal.org website and they also have some additional information that could be very useful for residents.

Rep. Christie Carpino: The first step when planning a trip to a kiosk or drop off site to collect the unwanted, unused, and expired medicines for disposal. What are the next steps and what can we expect once we arrive?

Irina Butler: Confirming any restrictions at the location and items accepted, and confirming hours of operation -- it's critical, have a plan. And then remove any personal information from the label and container. Take your medicine to the location where you can expect to find a secure kiosk, like a mailbox. If you can't find it, ask the store personnel where it is, and then finally dispose of your unwanted medicine in that kiosk. Those 5 steps are easy to do, and so, so important.

Rep. Christie Carpino: We're living in unprecedented times and many of us are worried about our own health. What precautions should we take, and will the sites be safe in regard to limiting our exposure to COVID-19?



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Irina Butler: We really are living through unprecedented times. Following [CDC guidelines](#) and your local regulations is the best way to avoid exposure to COVID-19. Also, call the disposal location ahead of time to determine any additional restrictions, hours of operation, and what items are accepted. Make sure you're there to run this errand successfully and have all of the information at your fingertips.

Rep. Christie Carpino: National Drug Take-Back only happens twice a year, in the fall and the spring; last October was [a success](#). Total law enforcement participation: 4,396. Total collection sites: 6,174. Total weight collected: 882,919 pounds, that's 441.5 tons. What are your hopes for National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day on Saturday October 24th this year?

Irina Butler: Well, I'm so happy that it's happening! We hope that it is a safe and successful event and that everyone who wants to participate is able to do so. We also want the public to know that if they miss this opportunity, that there are year-round options available to them to safely dispose of their unwanted or expired medications and they can do that by finding information on the [myoldmeds.com](#) website.

Rep. Christie Carpino: When a take-back option is not easily available, there are ways to dispose of medicines at home depending on the drug. What are the ways to safely dispose of medicines at home?

Irina Butler: This is a really great question, and this varies depending on where someone lives, since you should always follow your local community regulations and guidelines as we previously discussed. Some jurisdictions also recommend mixing it with used coffee grounds or kitty litter and disposing of it in your household trash. Again, it's always good to check with your local government waste disposal provider if you can't get to a disposal kiosk.

Rep. Christie Carpino: More than 25 million Americans have asthma and COPD, the third leading cause of death by disease in the United States. Many people rely on inhalers to administer their medication. How do you properly dispose of the canisters or inhalers?

Irina Butler: Patients should always review the product disposal guidelines and follow those; you can check with the prescriber or provider. And we also recommend that an individual check local regulations, since disposal methods can vary from location to location. There are available disposal sites that collect items such as inhalers. I would absolutely go to the [myoldmeds.com](#) website and check the kiosk locator; sites near you probably collect exactly what you need to dispose!

Rep. Christie Carpino: A [recent report](#) by [Safe Kids Worldwide](#) finds that among young children, 95% of medication-related poisoning visits to the ER were accidental and caused by a child ingesting medicine while unsupervised. In fact, about 165 kids, roughly 4 school busloads of children, are seen in hospitals for medication-related treatment every day in our country. Irina, how can we make sure this doesn't happen? Can you give us a few safe storage tips for all meds, including over the counter, to protect our nation's youth?



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Irina Butler: Sure! As a mom of two young children, I fully understand this concern. [Myoldmeds.com](https://myoldmeds.com) has information on the storage of household medicine to keep them away from your children -- we actually wrote [an article](#) on this exact issue. To summarize, pick a location that is hard to reach, out of sight, and if possible, in a secure storage device. For example, consider getting something small like a personal lock box. Think about places that your kids don't really utilize often, like a linen closet or any other location that you feel would be faced out of sight and hard to reach.

Rep. Christie Carpino: Overall what's the best way to clean out the medicine cabinet?

Irina Butler: It is hard to find extra time in the day to do this activity, so make sure you allow yourself time to start and finish this project, it is still important. This is one of those important issues that we all need to prioritize in our day and have a plan about what you're going to do once you are done cleaning it out: Where are you going to take it? How are you going to dispose of it according to local regulations and guidelines? How will you store it prior to making that trip or using another method? Then take inventory, don't just look in your medicine cabinet. Where else might you have medicine? Have you checked your nightstand? Junk drawers?

Group it all altogether, then go through it again. Non-expired medicine that is still in use, both prescription and non-prescription, should go on one side. Unwanted, unused medicine that you no longer need, should go on another side. Specifically, around expired medicine, spoiled medicine -- that is not a good idea to keep. Anything that might have been exposed to moisture, heat or other elements, definitely make sure that that it is disposed of. The unwanted, unused, spoiled, and expired medicine needs to be disposed immediately. If you have any unmarked medicine, you should dispose of those as well. If there's no expiration date, that should also be disposed of. The non-expired medicine or medicine that you are still taking, make sure it's appropriately stored safely for all, and then put it back in that place. And then once you have a good pile of medicine that is unwanted or expired, make sure that you immediately take it to the location that you already had in mind, and then the errand is done!

Rep. Christie Carpino: The [Pharmaceutical Product Stewardship Work Group](#) launched myoldmeds.com to provide education on the proper use, storage, and disposal of unwanted or expired household medicines. We've already learned about how we can use the locator to find more than 20,000 locations that either have a secure drug disposal kiosk or furnish a free in-home disposal kit upon request. I'd like to focus the next part of our conversation on proper use, particularly with older Americans. As we all age, it's no secret that medication management can become increasingly complex. The majority of seniors take multiple medications each day and they sometimes receive prescriptions from different doctors. From managing a medication schedule, to properly disposing of medicine, there are several steps seniors can take to help maintain their health and safely manage a regimen that includes multiple medicines.

The myoldmeds.com website [recommends keeping a medicine record](#). Can you explain what it entails and why it's so important?



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Irina Butler: Absolutely! It's so important to keep a medicine record, a notebook noting your doctor's prescription and a record of when you took them. We all live busy lives and it is easy to forget the task that becomes second nature. This notebook will take the guesswork out of that routine by confirming keeping track of the medicines you took. It's also a great idea to bring that to your doctor's appointment.

Rep. Christie Carpino: Irina, can you tell me why it's a good idea to use only one pharmacy and why it's important to ask the pharmacist questions?

Irina Butler: It helps because there's an electronic record of all the medicines you have been prescribed and they can double-check for any potential harmful interaction. Also, pharmacists are subject-matter experts; they are the experts, talk to them! Let's utilize them. Make sure you get whatever questions you may have answered. It's important and it's what they're there for. It should go without saying but I'm going to say it anyway, it is so important to read the label and print materials that come with your medication.

Rep. Christie Carpino: Can you give us a little more detail as to why people and caregivers should do this even when we're all so busy?

Irina Butler: 100%, it is so important to follow the directions that come with the medicine, so you properly take it as recommended by your healthcare provider. The ultimate goal here is the health and safety of you or the person you are caring for. The label and print materials can provide you very valuable information and it has information about side effects, importance to adherence, and ultimately effectiveness of the medicine.

Rep. Christie Carpino: Irina, do you have any closing statements perhaps one big takeaway for listeners?

Irina Butler: First of all, thank you for this opportunity to talk about a key issue facing everyone that takes medicine. I will limit my closing remarks to the following: please visit myoldmeds.com for information about proper use, taking your medicine as directed, proper storage. Keep your medicine in the safe, secure place in your home. Proper disposal--follow local regulations and guidelines, use the myoldmeds.com locator to find a location that has a kiosk or other disposal methods available. And finally ask questions--ask questions of subject-matter experts, ask questions of healthcare providers and pharmacists.

Rep. Christie Carpino: According to the [2018 national survey of drug use and health](#), the majority of abused prescription drugs are obtained from family and friends, often from the home medicine cabinet. That's why it's even more important than ever to securely store and dispose of unwanted, unused, or expired medications. Additionally, it's equally important for all patients to follow the instructions provided with medications, including labeling information and medication guidelines.



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