



Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

Regulation Change Encourages Safe Medication Use

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Most people can look into the medicine cabinet and find numerous prescription and over-the-counter medications. While most medications are prescribed to keep you healthy, or return you to health when sick, they can also cause serious problems if used incorrectly. A large percentage of adults in the United States are taking too many medications, not taking their medications correctly, or both.

The more medications you take, the greater the chance for these drugs to interact negatively. There is also greater risk of forgetting to take your medications, taking them at the wrong time, or taking too much or little. In fact, fatalities from unintentional overdoses of prescription medications now outnumber traffic fatalities in the United States. The odds of severe medical complications, even death, increase when prescription medications are abused or taken incorrectly.

To limit the misuse or abuse of prescription medications, the Army recently changed its policy for defining valid medical use of medication. The revised Medical Command regulation now imposes a six month time limit on valid medical prescriptions. For the purposes of evaluating a positive drug test, prescription medications are considered valid for up to six months after the fill date. Beyond that, any positive urine drug screen due to a prescription medication will be reported as a positive test. Exceptions may include evidence of a continued need in the Soldier's medical record. Positive results may lead to disciplinary or administrative action and adversely impact a Soldier's career.

The bottom line is that everyone should only take medications prescribed by a health-care provider for you. Use only FDA-approved over-the-counter medications and take recommended doses. Remember, "natural" does not always means safe! Clean out the medicine cabinet and properly dispose of unused and expired medications. To get rid of your medications, follow the steps available from the Smart Disposal website at www.smarxtdisposal.net. These include:

- * Follow specific disposal instructions on the drug label or patient information that accompanies the medication. Do not flush prescription drugs down the toilet unless this information specifically instructs you to do so.

- * Take advantage of community drug take-back programs, like the nationwide National Prescription Drug Take Back Days, that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal. Call your city or county government's household trash and recycling service. For El Paso and Teller counties, visit www.elpasoco.com and search "waste".



* If no instructions are on the label and no take-back program is available, throw the drugs in the household trash, but first take them out of their original containers and mix them with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter. The medication will be less appealing to children and pets, and unrecognizable to people who may go through your trash. Put them in a sealable bag, empty can, or other container to prevent the medication from leaking or breaking out of a garbage bag.

* Before throwing out a container, scratch out all identifying information on the prescription label to make it unreadable. This will help protect your identity and the privacy of your personal health information

* Do not give medications to friends. Doctors prescribe drugs based on a person's specific symptoms and medical history. A drug that works for you could be dangerous for someone else; besides, sharing prescribed medication is illegal.

* When in doubt about proper disposal, talk to your pharmacist.

It is clear that something needs to be done about the increasing problem of medications being taken incorrectly. Solutions will require patients to work in cooperation with all their healthcare providers.