

**Wisconsin Nurses Association  
2011 Reference Report #3**

**Subject:** Disposal of Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Products  
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**WNA Core Issue:** Continued Competencies and Patient Safety and Advocacy

**Summary:**

Nurses have the responsibility to provide a crucial role to address environmental health issues proactively consistent with our core value of social justice (American Nurses Association, 2007). Nursing professionals have the authority and ability to skillfully manage the disposal of Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Products (PPCPs) in the hospitals, client's homes, clinic settings, and long term care facilities. Nurses will need to consult with a multidisciplinary taskforce to develop innovative strategies to prevent pollution of our environment and primarily our water systems. Most sewer plants do not remove PPCPs as part of the filtration system. Nursing professionals need to take action in their settings to learn more about their opportunities to avoid discarding PPCPs into the environment.

The most progressive facility policies have been developed using information through collaboratives such as "Health Care Without Harm" (2011) and "Hospitals for a Healthy Environment" (Pine and Smith, 2007). These management practices were using the Precautionary Principle, which embraces the prevention of environmental pollution even though clear research has not demonstrated cause and effect.

PPCPs include all medications, soaps, topical agents, IV solutions, dermal patches, injectable medications, and cosmetic products. The pollution of the environment results from disposal of unused PPCPs directly into sewer systems, human and animal waste, industrial waste during production, run-off from feed lots, and expired medications. Problems related to this pollution are endocrine disruptors in the water, antibiotic resistance, and bioaccumulation of multiple chemicals.

Nurses work directly with clients in multiple settings and witness large amounts of unused medication from accumulating in clients' homes and facilities. Innovative systems are needed to avoid the wasting of medications. These systems may include prescribing changes, less PRN wastage, and trial dosing, especially for chronically ill patients. If medications do accumulate, these medications need to be returned in an appropriate medication "take back" program.

**Recommendations:** The Wisconsin Nurses Association will...

1. Support nursing professionals to teach clients, fellow nurses, and other professionals about the importance of preventing pollution of our water with Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Products (PPCPs).
2. Assist nursing professionals to expand their knowledge base about the toxicities of the products managed by nurses.
3. Promote systems that minimize the wasting of medications through creative methods in the different health care settings.

4. Encourage nursing educators to include environmental concerns about PPCPs at all educational levels.
5. Seek out PPCP disposal guidelines that protect the environment.
6. Encourage research on PPCPs to include increasing bioactivity of medications, environmental impact of PPCPs, minimization of industrial waste, system of prescribing and dispensing pharmaceuticals, and the disposal of PPCPs (Becker, 2010).

### **WNA Goals:**

Goal 1: Collectively and collaboratively advocate for access to comprehensive quality health care services for all people.

Goal 2: Assure that the registered nurse is an essential provider in all practice settings through education, research, workplace advocacy, legislation, and regulation.

### **References:**

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