



**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Matthew C. Mireles, Ph.D., M.P.H.  
6800 West Loop South, Suite 190  
Bellaire, Texas 77401  
Telephone and Fax: 832-778-7777  
Email: [mmireles@comofcom.com](mailto:mmireles@comofcom.com)  
Website: [www.comofcom.com](http://www.comofcom.com)

**NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Forty Percent of Prescription Medicines are Thrown Away—  
It is Time to Check Your Medicine Cabinet and Think about  
Safe Medication Practice**

(BELLAIRE, TEXAS – March 4, 2008) In observance of National Patient Safety Week 2008, Community Medical Foundation for Patient Safety warns everyone of the dangers of storing unused and expired medicines (UEM) at home. According to Dr. Elizabeth Smith, Founder of Community Medical Foundation, “it has become a silent national and global epidemic of stockpiling unwanted medicines in our cabinets and drawers.” Smith added, “Patient safety is studied largely in healthcare settings, and we do not know what is happening in our homes with regard to medication practice, where most medicines are taken.”

These UEM are hazardous to the household and neighborhood. Seniors confuse medications when there are too many. Accidental poisoning among young children and pets increases with more medicines at home; 36% of all accidental poisonings among children occur in grandparents’ homes. Teenagers have an easy access to prescription medicines to experiment with and abuse. Prescription medicine is now the leading cause of drug overdose seen in our emergency rooms and the second leading cause of accidental deaths, after car crashes. People steal medicines from the home and use them or sell them on the streets.

Disposing UEM by flushing them down the toilet or sink or throwing them out with household trash leads to other consequences. Thieves can steal your personal identity or know your medical condition from pill bottles in the garbage. Improper disposal of UEM can contaminate water supplies, including drinking water, because water treatment plants do not monitor for or clean out pharmaceutical compounds found in your medicines. Federal guidelines for drug disposal are confusing and complicated.



## Page 2

Most cities have no systematic ways to collect and dispose of UEM safely and legally. However, some communities have organized drug take-back programs to allow citizens to return their UEM for disposal, usually by approved incineration. The best model for a take-back program is a direct mail-back system developed by The Center on Aging, University of Maine, and funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Aging Initiative. In this pilot study, consumers can mail back their UEM from home at no cost.

Since 2004, the Community Medical Foundation has collected information across the country from drug take-back programs and is compiling a national directory of existing programs, as well as providing research support to community groups that are planning a take-back program or event. The Foundation has created the national Unused and Expired Medicines Registry to collect and analyze information on UEM. The Registry already is showing an astounding amount of waste in terms of medicines never used and the cost of these medicines. National samples of pill count reveal that 40% of prescription medicines were never used and would have been thrown away. This figure represents an expensive waste of healthcare resources when Medicare dollars are considered. Psychotherapeutic medicines, especially anti-depressants, were returned most frequently and comprised about 70% of this category. Patients typically stopped taking their medicines and stockpiled them at home long after the medicines expired.

Now is the time to check your medicine cabinets and drawers, take out all the UEM, and find the nearest drug take-back program to safely and legally get rid of them. If there is not a drug take-back program, the Foundation can help groups set up one. According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, only law enforcement officers can accept federally controlled substance, such as narcotics. The best strategies to deal with UEM are to know what kind of medicines you truly need and to take them as directed. Check with your doctor and pharmacist to make sure that the medicine is right for you, know how long you must to take the medicine, and get it in smaller orders, specifically for new medicines in the event of you have problems with it. Also, we have to move away from the idea that we need a prescription every time we see the doctor. Medicine can only be effective if it is right for you and taken correctly. For more safety tips and recommendations for safe medication practice, contact Community Medical Foundation for the Patient Safety Checklists.