

CASE STUDY

Benefits

- Cost Reduction
- Process Improvement
- Employee Engagement
- 2,535 lbs of waste diverted in 10 months
- 5,616 prescriptions for uninsured, low income patients

The Problem

It's estimated that \$2.2 billion in sample medications provided to medical practices go to waste each year, meanwhile millions of uninsured patients go without the medications they need due to cost. Additionally, Joint Commission reports that the mismanagement of medications (including sample medications inside medical practices) is one of the top ten most common infractions. Physicians and staff commonly dispose of samples as non-hazardous waste and without required documentation, and the medications end up in landfills or our water system. Others utilize the hospital pharmacy and reverse distribution contracts to dispose of sample medications as hazardous waste, increasing the cost of disposal.

The Strategy Selected

In the late 1990s, the FDA approved the donation of drug samples from a licensed practitioner to a charitable institution for use by the patients of a charitable institution. By donating sample medications to the Dispensary of Hope, a non-profit organization that redistributes surplus medications to the uninsured, medical practices can realize a substantial diversion of medications from waste streams while increasing compliance, generating cost-savings, and providing medications to patients that would otherwise go without.

St. Vincent Health implemented the Dispensary of Hope's "Hope Boxes" as a sample medication inventory system and ongoing donation process in 116 practices at St. Vincent Medical Group.



Implementation Process

A multifaceted implementation approach was led by St. Vincent Medical Group's CEO whose objective was to incorporate the Dispensary of Hope donation process into a policy versus a voluntary charitable opportunity.

Operations

The primary concern of Operations was the time required to donate; therefore, the Dispensary of Hope was presented as an "inventory management solution" that was ultimately a time-saving/process-improvement mechanism.

Compliance

It was illustrated to Compliance that the current practice was to let samples expire, and only after an office could no longer find storage for their samples, would they seek out a method of disposal. Compliance appreciated the proactive approach of donating medications at 6 months prior to expiration to avoid expired medications altogether. After Compliance reviewed the program to ensure the legality of donation, the policy was incorporated into the standard operating procedures of the medical group.

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Practice Managers and Physicians

The Dispensary of Hope business model and process for donation was presented to the practice managers and physicians and was received with enthusiasm. Practices have few opportunities to help the uninsured—especially in a way that actually saves time and increases compliance. Through the Dispensary of Hope, they can provide a desperately needed resource with no disruption to daily work and at the same time be celebrated for their participation.

After meeting with the practice managers and physicians, each practice received a Hope Box. Upon receiving a monthly reminder phone call and fax from the Dispensary of Hope, each practice's designated "Hope Box Champion" fills the box with medications that have reached 6 months prior to expiration and uses the prepaid shipping label to ship the Hope Box back to the Dispensary of Hope. Once processed, each practice receives an itemized report along with a new Hope Box to fill the following month.

As an added bonus, the practices were permitted to donate samples with *less than* 6 months of expiration (including expired medications) with the first donation as a one-time clean out.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Practices must understand that it takes *monthly* review of their sample medication inventory and be committed to donating *all* medications that have reached the 6 months to ensure that *not one pill goes to waste*—that is expire before reaching a patient. This takes ongoing monitoring which is aided by the Dispensary of Hope's quarterly roll-up reports. The report identifies each practice that is donating and the volumes of usable versus short-dated and expired medication.

Demographic Information

St. Vincent Medical Group, a division of St. Vincent Health, is a comprehensive network of more than 500 primary and specialty care providers serving residents in 35 counties across Indiana.