

Carlson Drug adds dropbox for unused medications

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

Area residents will have a safer option for disposing of unused medications in 2017.

Carlson Drug, 821 Sixth Street, Umatilla, is adding a secure metal dropbox where people can get rid of unused or expired medications. The Umatilla Police Department and in-kind help from the city with installation.

The box will be available for use by the first of the year.

Cathy Putnam, owner of Carlson Drug, said people are always asking her how they can safely dispose of the rest of their

prescription once they no longer need the drugs they were taking.

"We get calls every day," she said.

The large metal dropbox — similar to the blue mailboxes in front of a post office — will be bolted securely to the ground, locked and placed under the watchful eye of pharmacy employees. Deposited medications are then sealed up and given to a company that disposes of them using methods that keep contaminants from entering the water supply or posing other health risks.

"We don't have to touch anything, which makes it safe for everyone," Putnam said.

Syringes and illegal drugs will not be accepted. Darla Huxel, Umatilla

police chief, said in an email that it was unusual for a dropbox to be provided outside of a police station but Putnam was willing to work with the Drug Enforcement Administration to provide the proper security measures to allow for the exception.

"I wanted to provide an opportunity for the people in our community to have access to the drop box without having to go to Hermiston Police Department," she said.

Liz Marvin, board chair for the Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation, said prescription painkillers and other dangerous prescription medications are often stolen from medicine cabinets, so the sooner people can get rid of their unused portions of prescriptions, the

better.

"It's really a public safety thing," she said.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, an average of 78 people per day die of an opioid overdose, including heroin and prescription painkillers. Earlier this month, President Barack Obama signed into law the 21st Century Cures Act, which includes a pledge to distribute \$1 billion to the states to fund opioid abuse prevention and treatment programs.

Putnam said there are methods for safely disposing of drugs that she shares with her customers, but many people have said they feel better letting someone else handle it. For home disposal, the Food and Drug Administration recommends mix-

ing the medications with an unpalatable substance like kitty litter or used coffee grounds and sealing them in a plastic bag before throwing them away.

The FDA's website has a list of drugs that are approved for flushing down the toilet, but the practice is generally discouraged because it can contaminate the water supply and hurt the environment.

Each April and September the Drug Enforcement Agency hosts national drug take-back days, and the Hermiston Police Department and Pendleton Police Department also have dropboxes in their lobbies where pills and patches can be dropped off with no questions asked.

Contact Jade McDowell at 541-564-4536.



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE McDOWELL

Liz Marvin, left, and Cathy Putnam show off a new medication disposal dropbox at Carlson Drug in Umatilla.



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