Editorial: Clean out your medicine cabinet

Staff Reports

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It is a shock to realize that one of today's biggest drug problems involves the misuse of legal drugs.

It is a tragedy to learn that nine of the 13 underage deaths caused by drugs and alcohol in Ventura County over the last two years involved prescription or over-the-counter drugs, as The Star reported recently.

It is a situation that cries out for a solution. Fortunately, one is readily at hand; but it is not a simple solution. To produce results, it requires people to participate on a widespread, house-by-house basis.

Officials say one of the reasons for abuse of legal drugs is their availability in a family medicine cabinet. Sometimes, they are leftover painkillers, sedatives or other pills that are no longer needed and that won't be noticed if they disappear.

Patrick Zarate, division manager for alcohol and drug programs at the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department, told The Star that people should consider the following advice for dealing with a leftover supply of a prescribed drug: "Rather than hanging on to it, thinking you might need it, it's better to get rid of it," he said.

Residents can find facilities for disposing of unwanted medications at several police stations in the county; residents also can ask their local police-station officials for directions to the nearest drop-off location.

Water agency officials urge residents not to flush unwanted drugs down the toilet because doing so could have adverse effects on water-treatment systems.

The Star urges every resident to clean out the family medicine cabinet and take any expired and unused medications to a disposal station. Through such actions, residents can help save lives and prevent harm to others.

The problem is genuine: Police say teens and young adults are using powerful painkillers and other pills as a gateway to street heroin in Ventura County. In 2009, more than 230 people below the age of 26, including teens, were treated at area hospital emergency rooms because of problems caused by sedatives or opioids. Three years earlier, such cases numbered just 138. So, the numbers show that the problem is on the increase in this county.

It is a problem that can be reduced partly by individual action, starting in each family's medicine cabinet.