Antibiotic Amnesty: Engaging with the public across the Midlands region of England

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AIM

To engage with and raise awareness of the general public on safe disposal of unused and / or unwanted antibiotics.

To reduce the environmental impacts and effects on antimicrobial resistance of saving, sharing and unsafe disposal of antibiotics.

INTRODUCTION

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is recognised as a significant threat to human health; almost 5 million deaths were estimated due to AMR in 2019 (The Lancet 2022). In addition to the known risks of saving antibiotics for later use or sharing with others, there is increasing evidence of the impact on AMR of the inappropriate disposal of antibiotics through domestic waste or down sinks/the toilet.

Raising awareness of the importance of safe disposal of unused or unwanted antibiotics is an important public health intervention, and community pharmacies are well placed to undertake this role.

Engaging with the public on issues around antimicrobial resistance has always been challenging due to the complexities of the issues involved. We aimed to develop a simple and effective campaign to promote the positive contribution that the public can make by returning unused/unwanted antibiotics to local pharmacies for safe disposal.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

An Antibiotic Amnesty campaign developed collaboratively for use across the NHS England Midlands region.

To engage the public locally, the amnesty was actively promoted via the CCGs involved, GP practices, and participating community pharmacies using social media, website content and posters.

Community pharmacy teams were invited to participate, with information provided via an educational webinar and campaign resources were provided.

The amnesty resource pack included the digital resources in 13 languages, made available for use across the Midlands.

Participating pharmacies promoted the amnesty using the resources provided and had 'amnesty conversations' with the public about the appropriate use of antibiotics

Voluntary data collection (15-30 Nov 2021) by pharmacy teams included part and full packs of antibiotics returned, use of TARGET antibiotic checklist (also part of PQS) & 'amnesty conversations'.

The Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC) and Local Authority (LA) collaborated to provide support for implementation of the project.

PROJECT IMPACT

Engagement with 7800 members of the public, raising awareness of the importance of the safe disposal of antibiotics:

- Increasing awareness of the general public about the threat of AMR, appropriate use of antibiotics, and the safe disposal of antibiotics

Return and safe disposal of almost 500 packs of antibiotics:

- Preventing potentially unsafe disposal of antibiotics, for example down toilets, sinks or in domestic refuse, and subsequent contamination of the environment.
- Reducing the likelihood of people saving/sharing antibiotics and the consequences on health and AMR that this may have.

Greater collaboration with organisations across the local systems.

- Engagement of 240 community pharmacy teams in additional antimicrobial stewardship work.
- Education of stakeholders on the amnesty campaign and local AMR priorities/issues, via educational webinars
- Production of new resources that are available to use by other organisations.
- Stronger links with Local Authority, Local Pharmaceutical Committees and other local NHS organisations.

Example resources

Outcome	Numbers
AMR conversations with patients during amnesty campaign	7846
TARGET checklist completed during amnesty campaign	4600
Number full packs of antibiotics returned	126
Number part packs of antibiotics returned	369

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

During the antibiotic amnesty period, pharmacies directly engaged with nearly 8,000 people about the campaign and almost 500 part or full packs of antibiotics were returned. Analysis of data returned showed that having amnesty conversations significantly increased the number of part packs returned, compared to neither the amnesty conversation or TARGET antibiotic checklist being used.

Limitations of the project included the duration of the data collection, which meant we were not able to see the impact of the campaign on longer-term behaviours of the public. Participation by pharmacies was voluntary so were unable to include antibiotics returned to non-participating pharmacies in the data returned and we were only able to reasonably ask for a limited amount of data to be collated by those who engaged.

Despite these limitations, we believe this was a successful public health project which resulted in a significant amount of unused antibiotics being disposed of safely, with commensurate benefits for the environment and the risk of AMR. Utilising the already recognisable Keep Antibiotics Working and Antibiotic Guardian campaign resources allowed us to build on previous public engagement. There has been interest from other healthcare organisations in running the campaign in other areas of the country and we intend to expand the scope of the project to make it a One Health approach.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

For 2022 we are building on the success of, and lessons learned from, the 2021 campaign to increase public engagement by:

- Including pet owners in the campaign
- Enlisting the support of a wider group of organisations to advertise the campaign to staff and members of the public, including dental surgeries, local NHS Trusts, local universities and local veterinary practices.
- Collaborating with local universities to develop and implement MPharm student projects to gather more detail about returned antibiotics.
- Trial of survey using QR codes linked to a public survey to gather more qualitative information on patient engagement/attitudes/beliefs.
- Developing a post-campaign feedback survey for community pharmacy.
- Collaborating with Royal Pharmaceutical Society to develop a website to host and share campaign resources.
- Collaborating internationally to spread the campaign.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & CONTACT

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