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“WHEN UNCONTROLLED WASTE
IS IMPROPERLY DISPOSED OF, IT AFFECTS
EVERY LIVING THING IN THE ENVIRONMENT.”

CLEAN WASTE

Future Healthcare talks to **TERRI CLOUSE** RN, CNOR, National Sales Manager, Bemis, about effective medical waste disposal

Future Healthcare Why is there the need to control medical waste effectively?

TERRI CLOUSE In March 2008, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) did a study that revealed that pharmaceutical drugs were found in the drinking water of 24 major metro areas. Just six months later, in September 2008, it was revealed that the majority of 5,700 hospitals and 45,000 long-term care facilities surveyed flushed their wasted drugs into the water supply through sewer systems that cannot filter pharmaceuticals.

To correct this, Congress passed significant

legislation during the Drug Free Water Act in January 2009. What this activity means to health-care facilities is a fine raised from \$32,500 to \$37,500 with possible criminal penalties and a liability scope that includes management and CEOs.

Safety is the most important factor in effectively controlling medical waste. Not only is keeping the public safe a huge concern, but it's also important to protect the health and safety of contractors and hospital personnel who will be handling medical waste on a day-to-day basis. Following regulations is a key means to this end.

FH What are the possible results of uncontrolled waste?

TC When uncontrolled waste is improperly disposed of, it affects every living thing in the environment. Humans, animals and plants are all put at risk. Waste ends up in our drinking water, albeit in small amounts. The effect of drugs in the water supply is still unknown, but many experts believe the potential for harm is still there. Recent laboratory research has found that small amounts of medication have affected human embryonic kidney cells, human blood cells and human breast cancer cells. People like Joel Tickner, an environmental scientist at the University of Massachusetts, compare the issue to the way lead additives and asbestos were dealt with. That is to say, not until they caused significant damage.



“IMPROPER USE MAY RESULT IN RISK TO THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF MEDICAL-WASTE HANDLING PERSONNEL, THE COMMUNITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT. IT CAN ALSO LEAD TO GOVERNMENTAL SANCTION... THAT BEING SAID, ANYONE WHO HANDLES MEDICAL WASTE CAN BE TRAINED...”

Also, pharmaceuticals in waterways are damaging wildlife across the nation and around the globe, research shows. For instance, male fish are being feminized, creating egg yolk proteins, a process usually restricted to females.

Besides public risk and stiff fines, which I mentioned, some in the healthcare community who regularly come in contact with medical waste express a concern for future effects not only on themselves, but their families as well.

FH Can medical waste be minimized?

TC The amount that comes into contact with the general public certainly can. Based on the September 2008 EPA survey, an estimated total volume of 250 million pounds of drug waste is flushed through sewer systems per year. At that point there's no turning back, because current wastewater treatment methods aren't effective in detecting medical waste substances.

As bodies such as the EPA continue to monitor the environment and enforce regulation through audits, we hope to see significant improvement both in terms of compliance of healthcare facilities and improved results in water studies.

The volume of waste itself will be difficult to minimize, but that doesn't necessarily mean

we won't try. Waste reduction isn't a new concept for Bemis Health Care. In the late '90s, Bemis introduced the Vac-U-Port System, the first product to address the everyday challenges of proper fluid waste disposal. In 2004, Bemis developed Quick Drain, which was designed to reduce risk related to infectious waste disposal. Also, incineration of waste is starting to rise in popularity, and our new containers help minimize the risk of improper disposal of hazardous materials. Going forward, how we dispose of waste includes many other possibilities other than adding to landfills and waterways.

FH How important is training when using these products? Is the disposal of waste something anyone can do, or do you need to be specially briefed on proper methods and procedures?

TC Considering the stakes, it's very important to be well trained. Each container we produce has a different set of operating guidelines in regard to what waste goes where. It is very important for our sales reps to answer all questions clients may have on proper use of our waste containers. Improper use may result in risk to the health and safety of medical waste handling personnel, the

community and the environment. It can also lead to governmental sanction, which will only cost more money in the long run. It is very important to understand how to use our products correctly.

That being said, anyone who handles medical waste can be trained to safely use our products.

FH Aside from the products themselves, what does Bemis offer in the way of medical waste management training and customer service?

TC Bemis goes the extra mile with the training that accompanies our complete line of waste containers to meet all client needs. We want to make sure that correct procedures are followed and that personnel understand which waste containers to use, depending on the type of medical waste they are handling. For instance, yellow containers are used for Chemo waste, red containers are used for Sharps, blue containers are used for pharmaceuticals, and so on. Our training materials and user guides explain this in more detail, and we will also offer waste segregation posters to be placed on-site for easy reminders.

Also, a representative will be available if needed. We have a service base with a wide territory throughout the U.S. and Canada, so help is never far away. **FH**



TERRI CLOUSE, RN, CNOR, has been an Operating Room Nurse for 21 years, filling a variety of positions from management to scrubbing and circulating surgical cases. In May 2005, she accepted a position with Bemis Health Care as their clinical consultant, working with the sales reps to educate new customers on the use of Bemis products. Ms. Clouse became National Sales Manager in January 2009. While her responsibilities have changed, she still enjoys the contact with the nurses and hospital personnel using Bemis for the first time. Ms. Clouse continues to maintain her CNOR by working PRN at a hospital in Indianapolis.



Because medical waste affects our ecosystem

Protect it with **Sentinel™**
by **BEMIS®**



Control Today. Protect Tomorrow.™

Today, it's not only about protecting patients and staff; it's about protecting the environment. Uncontrolled medical waste threatens our water supply and precious ecosystem. With corporate fines set at \$37,500 per violation, it's important to be trained on proper disposal methods and products. Bemis® is committed to helping you be in compliance. Discover our complete line of Sentinel™ by Bemis® Waste Disposal products and how we can help you manage hospital waste and save money as we all do our part to protect the world we live in.



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