Diabetes Educational Services

California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health

Diabetes Coalition of California

National Multiple Sclerosis Society Northern California Chapter

California Sharps Coalition

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Most Drug Makers Failing at Providing Safe Needle Disposal, Report Card Shows

Companies' own reports show little progress in helping MS, diabetes patients safely dispose of sharps

SACRAMENTO – Makers of injectable drugs that treat chronic illnesses, such as multiple sclerosis and diabetes, are failing to provide patients safe, convenient, cost effective methods of needle disposal. That's what a new Report Card released today by a legislative evaluation team shows.

"Consumers want the answer to a simple question: what am I supposed to do with these things once I've used them?" said State Senator Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto), who authored the 2009 law requiring injectable drug manufacturers to submit reports to the state detailing their sharps disposal programs. "This law provides consumers using 'sharps' the opportunity to do some comparison shopping, and highlights manufacturers who are marketing consumer-friendly products, as well as those who are clearly part of the problem."

Simitian's SB 486 (2009) requires makers of injectable drugs to submit annual reports to the Department of Resource Recovery & Recycling regarding their programs to provide patients options for disposal of used sharps. The bill was a result of an idea from Betty Lipkin of San Carlos, who lives with Multiple Sclerosis and who submitted the idea to Senator Simitian's annual "There Oughta Be A Law" contest.

Senator Simitian said improperly discarded sharps are an environmental threat and pose unnecessary risks to children, caregivers, hotel employees, janitors and solid waste workers.

Despite a 2006 law making it illegal to dispose of used sharps in the waste stream, Waste Management, Inc., reports that accidental needle sticks are the number one reported injury at their materials recovery centers. Nationwide, there approximately 267,000 accidental needle sticks each year, resulting in over $175 million in costs to treat individuals who contract blood borne pathogens such as HIV and hepatitis.

It is estimated that over one million people in California use syringes and other sharps for home health care. Approximately one in twelve households in California have an individual who must self-administer an injection to treat a number of illnesses including diabetes, multiple sclerosis, cancer, anemia, and migraines. This generates approximately 386 million sharps each year in the state of California that require disposal.

Last year, an evaluation team created criteria by which to evaluate and grade those reports. The evaluation team, made up of the National MS Society, the Diabetes Coalition of California, the California Conference of Environmental Health Directors and consumer health organizations then scored the first round of reports submitted in July, giving points for such items as the quality of patient education, implementing manufacturer-sponsored needle mail-back programs, or collaborating with drug store chains to take back used needles in secure, FDA-approved containers.

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"Apart from two companies, the report cards show the industry is failing," said Beverly Thomassian, RN and President of Diabetes Educational Services. "The legislature created an open book test and the pharmaceutical companies just seem to be too cool to get good grades. While we salute Abbott and Johnson & Johnson, the industry has a long way to go to fulfill their responsibilities to the complete needs of their customers."

Points and grades given to some of the major drug companies include:

Abbott Laboratories 92 A-
Amgen 62 D-
Amylin 22 F
Baxter 2 F
Bayer 21 F
Biogen Idec 22 F
Bristol Meyers Squibb 75 C
Johnson & Johnson (Centocor-Ortho Biotech) 93 A-
CSL Behring 2 F
Eisai 46 F
Eli Lilly 23 F
EMD Serono/Gonal-f 65 D
EMD Serono/ Other 68 C
Ferring 17 F
GlaxoSmithKline 49 F
InterMune 20 F
Merck & Co. 32 F
Pfizer 35 F
Roche/Genentech 73 C
Sanofi-Aventis 36 F
Teva Biologics 18 F
Teva Neuroscience 22 F

Paul W. Lofholm, PharmD serves on the Evaluation Team. He is the Immediate Past President of the California Pharmacists Association and a Clinical Professor of Pharmacy at the University of California, San Francisco. He says 75% percent of California's injectable drug makers failed because they either did not in any way meet customer expectations or did not submit reports at all and are currently not in compliance with the law.

"The failing companies' literature is almost completely silent on disposal methods," said Ralph Cyr, a self-injector and member of the Evaluation Team that crafted the report cards. "Some actually give patients the impression that they can put used sharps in non-approved containers and dispose of them in the regular trash. This is utterly false and against the law."

New reports are again required to be received by the state this coming July. Based on the results of the 2010 report cards, evaluation team members say they will fast track the scoring and release 2011 report cards by the end of this summer.

Until significant resources are put behind giving patients the tools they need to properly dispose of their sharps, people will be left completely in the dark.

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Attachment: Evaluation team roster

For complete copies of drug company reports, visit:
http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/homehazwaste/sharps/reporting/

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