

About Saint Francis Hospice

Saint Francis Hospice provides care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to local people affected by life-limiting illnesses. As a registered charity, we rely on the financial support of our community to keep providing world class care free of charge to individuals and their families. Every year, we provide treatment, care and support to more than 4,000 local people affected by a life-limiting illness.

The Hall
Havering-atte-Bower
Romford
Essex RM4 1QH

Call: 01708 753319
Email:
mail@sfh.org.uk
Visit:
www.sfh.org.uk

This leaflet has been reviewed by the service users
Reviewed annually
Updated October 2018



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living with dignity



Medicines at home: Safe storage, and disposal when no longer needed

Working in partnership with:

NHS Waltham Forest Clinical Commissioning Group (WF CCG)

NHS Barking, Havering and Redbridge Clinical Commissioning Group (BHR CCGs)

North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT)

Approved by BHR CCGs Area Prescribing sub-Committees: March 2019

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Coping with medication when poorly

People who are poorly may be subject to frequent adjustments to medication, and can struggle to manage their medicines and medication regimes. Family and friends who are helping can also find this hard.

Please let your GP, district or community nurse or hospice nurse know if you are in difficulties. They are all experienced in helping people who are finding their medicines difficult to take or to manage.

Medication no longer needed

Cupboards can soon fill up and it can be difficult to know what to do with medication when it is no longer being taken. It can be hard to identify what might still be useful and what will never be needed again.

Please do contact your GP, district or community nurse or hospice nurse if you are not sure what you should keep and what should be disposed of.

Disposing of medication no longer needed: Can the medication be disposed with general waste?

No. All medication needs to be disposed of safely. Incorrect disposal may put others at risk. Medications that enter the sewage system via sinks, toilets and drains can affect the water supply, causing harm. The only safe way to dispose of medication is to take it to a pharmacy. The pharmacy staff will dispose of the medication safely.

Can the unwanted medication be taken to any pharmacy?

Yes. All community pharmacies are licensed to safely dispose of medication. It doesn't matter if the pharmacy being used is not the one that originally dispensed the medication.

Where should unwanted medication be stored until taken for disposal?

Keep all medication safely, ideally in a locked cabinet or drawer, out of reach of children, pets and vulnerable adults.

What do I do with Sharps Boxes no longer needed?

Ring your District Nurse team who will arrange for your sharps boxes to be collected. If you do not have a District Nurse you can arrange collection through the borough's waste disposal services.

When somebody has died, what should happen to their medication?

The medication technically belongs to the person who has died. However the medication is not required to be kept, except when the death is referred to the Coroner.

The family or those close to the person who has died should return all medications to a community pharmacy for safe disposal when they feel ready to do so. Meanwhile the medications should be stored in a safe place, away from the reach of children, pets and vulnerable adults.

What if the person's death is referred to the Coroner?

In this circumstance all medication, including controlled medications such as morphine should be kept in the home of the person who has died until the Coroner gives permission for removal. The Coroner's Officer will let family know when the medication can be removed for safe disposal (by taking it to a pharmacy).

Permission for removal

is usually granted within seven days. During this time you are advised to store the medications in a safe place, away from the reach of children, pets and vulnerable adults.

What happens to the medication if the person who has died was in a Nursing Home?

Staff at the Nursing Home will arrange for the disposal of the medication.

Please ring the Saint Francis Hospice helpline on 01708 758643 if you have any worries or further questions about disposal of medication.

Caring for a relative or loved one when they are seriously ill with an advanced progressive life limiting illness can be challenging and demanding. Supporting a relative or loved one who is dying is especially hard. Please do contact for advice and support as needed.

Other supporting leaflets you may find helpful

- Coping with dying
- Guidance and Support after someone dies