

New service helps hospitals manage their drug waste

This past June, North Shore University Hospital in Manhasset, N.Y., was fined \$40,000 by the Environmental Protection Agency for failing to determine whether its chemotherapy waste was hazardous prior to its disposal.

North Shore hospital isn't alone. Other hospitals are at risk of being found in violation of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, since the EPA recently announced plans to audit 480 hospitals in New York and New Jersey.

Hospitals that find it a challenge to comply with the pharmaceutical waste disposal standards from the federal and state government and the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations have a new service they can turn to for help: PharmEcology Associates, a waste management consulting firm based in Brookfield, Wis. Formed in 2000, the company launched a new service this past April called the PharmEcology Wizard. A subscription-based service, the Wizard allows users to electronically look up a product by its NDC number or brand or generic name and determine which of three categories it falls under:

- Red: a federal hazardous waste
- Green: a nonhazardous waste
- Yellow: one that should be handled as a hazardous waste because of its potential to cause harm, even though the regulations don't require it—what PharmEcology calls a "risk management" category

The Wizard database includes

more than 100,000 products and is updated weekly as new drugs are approved.

For hospitals that don't have the time to look up each product individually, PharmEcology can also conduct an electronic formulary review for them. This involves examining all of the drugs on a hospital's formulary and identifying the ones that should be segregated and handled with care. This offers hospitals an immediate starting point.

In addition to these services, on request,

PharmEcology consultants will visit a facility to do an on-site review, offer a seminar on environmental regulations, and provide an action plan with specific recommendations for compliance.

According to PharmEcology president Charlotte Smith, M.S., R.Ph., the services her company offers are sorely needed. Pharmacists don't have the background in proper waste disposal. "I certainly wasn't trained on this 12 years ago," she said.

Indeed there are many regulations that could trip up hospitals. For instance, there are different requirements for the disposal of P-listed chemicals, which EPA considers the worst of the worst, versus the U-listed ones, the second level down. "You can't dilute P- and U-listed waste to make it nonhazardous," Smith cautioned. "If you dilute it, you just make more hazardous waste." Hospitals that produce more than 2.2 lb. of P-listed chemicals a month are considered

large-quantity waste generators; they have additional regulatory standards they must meet. Smith warned that hospitals that don't carefully manage their waste could quickly end up in the status of a large generator.

Aware that pharmacists need help with this liability-laden area, Smith, who started out as a reverse distributor, launched PharmEcology to offer a centralized place they can turn to for information.

For their services, PharmEcology consultants charge \$1,995 for an annual subscription to the Wizard, \$2,000 for an on-site review, and up to \$1,000 for the electronic formulary review. Hospitals can get discounts if they belong to group purchasing organizations, such as All-Health, University HealthSystem Consortium, MedAssets, AmeriNet, Greater New York Hospital Association Services, Premier, and PACT.

Jackson Memorial Hospital is one facility that has used PharmEcology's services. Reached on the day of a scheduled inspection by county environmental inspectors, Clifford Restler, M.S., R.Ph., BCNSP, manager of sterile products at the Miami hospital, told *Drug Topics* that PharmEcology has offered the facility "some immediate and long-term solutions on how to handle our hazardous waste, some of which we've implemented and some of which we are in the process of implementing."

Restler added that the firm's costs are "very reasonable," considering what it does for hospitals. "You get good value for your dollars, and it's definitely better than paying a fine, since fines could be as high as \$24,000 a day."

For more information, visit the company's Web site at www.pharmacology.com or e-mail Smith at csmith@pharmacology.com.

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Smith

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