

## **A pharmaceutical and sharps waste compliance service for your facilities**

Hospital leaders know that often staff do not correctly segregate pharmaceutical waste from sharps waste. A comingled pharmaceutical and sharps waste compliance service introduced in the Pacific Northwest a year ago takes this drug waste and puts both waste streams into one container that can be in the patient room and that helps keep hospitals compliant.

Only about five percent of most hospitals' regulated medical waste streams are RCRA hazardous pharmaceuticals. This leaves the remaining 95 percent of most hospital formularies deemed Washington State Only Dangerous Pharmaceuticals (a.k.a. non-RCRA) to be managed by staff who want to do the right thing. First they must understand the importance of disposing non-RCRA drugs in a responsible place for proper processing, as Virginia Mason in Seattle does with approximately 2,000 drugs in its formulary.

There is also the challenge of maintaining a safe work environment and being OSHA compliant with sharps disposal. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that are 385,000 healthcare worker (HCW) needlestick and sharps-related injuries annually in hospitals nationwide.<sup>1</sup>

[Stericycle's Rx Waste Comingle program](#) enables staff to dispose of both non-RCRA pharmaceutical waste and sharps waste in one container. This makes it easy on staff to quickly dispose of both waste streams conveniently while in patient rooms and helps reduce needlestick injuries during disposal. Monthly comingled reports make it easy for healthcare leaders to track and budget for appropriately managing these two important waste streams.

The comingled program being offered in the Pacific Northwest helps healthcare facilities increase regulatory compliance with The Joint Commission, EPA, DOT, OSHA and, specifically in the Pacific Northwest, the Department of Ecology. Internally, it reduces staff time dedicated to ordering and monitoring container inventory, increasing patient care time.

For almost a year [Virginia Mason's](#) John Kolojaco, Institutional Safety Officer, has used the solution benefiting from Stericycle's auditing and retraining processes performed on site, as staffing continually changes.

"Patient care comes first. We were motivated to implement a better process for responsibly disposing of used sharps and medications that would also enhance patient and staff safety. Hectic schedules and large patient volumes can challenge proper disposal. A one-container system works well for our staff and ultimately for our patients. Thanks to training there is a flow that is undisturbed and several steps eliminated for my staff," noted Kolojaco.

The unique container design helps increase safety with an easy-to-use lid that allows easy disposal of sharps and also limits the risk of needlestick and other sharp injuries. A Stericycle technician proactively exchanges the containers, helping to avoid the container becoming overfilled.

The program utilizes reusable containers that also help reduce a healthcare facility's

carbon footprint. The environmental impact of using reusable containers helps reduce the volume of plastic and cardboard that goes to local landfills, allowing sustainability goals to be achieved.

[CHI Franciscan Health System](#) leaders wanted to identify a process to help eliminate medications and sharps waste from being disposed in red bags dedicated to regulated medical waste. “We wanted to make it easy for staff to be compliant with waste stream disposal at all eight hospitals. The comingle program simplifies waste stream disposal and places the right container at various points of care to make it convenient for staff to properly dispose of sharps and non-RCRA pharmaceutical waste,” said Jean Borth, program manager of accreditation and patient safety.

<sup>1</sup>[“Stop Sticks Campaign,”](#) The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.