PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE RECYCLING

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

The intersection of healthcare advancement and environmental sustainability poses a unique challenge: pharmaceutical waste. As the pharmaceutical industry expands to meet growing global needs, it also assumes a greater responsibility to mitigate environmental damage. The improper disposal of pharmaceutical products not only endangers ecosystems but also poses significant risks to human health, water sources, and biodiversity.

This book arrives at a pivotal time, providing critical perspectives on managing pharmaceutical waste through innovative and eco-conscious approaches. It thoughtfully explores topics ranging from classification and treatment processes to digital transformation, public awareness, and policy frameworks. What distinguishes this work is its multidisciplinary approach, which brings together the scientific, technological, and socio-political dimensions of waste management. Each chapter reflects the authors' academic rigor and commitment to real-world impact. Their work contributes meaningfully to ongoing efforts in making the pharmaceutical sector more responsible and sustainable.

I commend the editors and contributors for compiling this essential source of knowledge, and I am confident that readers will find in it both inspiration and practical guidance.

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PREFACE

Pharmaceutical waste management has become a pressing concern in today's rapidly evolving healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors. As the world becomes increasingly aware of the environmental and public health implications of improper waste disposal, the need for comprehensive, innovative, and sustainable strategies has never been more urgent. This book, "***Pharmaceutical Waste Recycling: Opportunities and Challenges***," was conceived to address these critical issues and provide a unified platform for knowledge, research, and real-world practices in this domain.

This collaborative volume brings together the expertise of distinguished contributors, each offering unique insights into various aspects of pharmaceutical waste—from classification and effects to advanced recycling technologies and policy frameworks. We hope that this book will serve not only as a valuable academic resource but also as a practical guide for industry professionals, environmentalists, policymakers, students, and researchers who are committed to fostering sustainable pharmaceutical waste management.

We would like to thank all the authors for their dedicated efforts, valuable contributions, and commitment to advancing this crucial field. We also extend our gratitude to the institutions and mentors who supported this endeavor.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction of Pharmaceutical Waste: Sources and Classification

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Abstract: Pharmaceutical waste is a major environmental and public health problem because it can pollute ecosystems and lead to problems such as antimicrobial resistance. This chapter defines pharmaceutical waste as unused medicine, personal care products, and accessories that need special collection and disposal. It discusses the main sources of pharmaceutical waste, ranging from healthcare facilities, drug manufacturing, homes, veterinary and agricultural sectors, to illegal drug markets. The chapter also explores several classification approaches for pharmaceutical waste by chemical composition, level of hazard, physical state, and regulatory classifications to guide suitable disposal and treatment. It also explores some of the challenges in determining and classifying pharmaceutical waste, including inconsistency in international regulations, non-uniform systems, analytical complexity in trace detection, and information gaps on pharmaceutical environmental fate. Based on notable academic research, the chapter emphasizes the importance of understanding pharmaceutical waste sources and classification to develop effective management practices and prevent their negative effects.

Keywords: Environmental contamination, Healthcare facilities, Pharmaceutical waste, Regulatory frameworks, Sustainable management, Waste classification.

INTRODUCTION

Pharmaceutical waste means unwanted, unused, or expired pharmaceutical products, drugs, and allied materials that are no longer effective for their purpose.

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Suman Gautam, Jai Narayan Mishra, Preeti Mishra, Preeti Verma & Sudhanshu Mishra (Eds.)

This group encompasses tablets, syrups, injectables, creams, and even the packaging or container of these products. The development of the pharmaceutical industry, wider availability of drugs, and modified patterns of healthcare have greatly added to the waste being generated in different sectors. Flushing drugs into sewage systems, open dumping in landfills, or burning them without environmental regulation can result in the contamination of soil, groundwater, and surface water [1]. Even tiny amounts of active pharmaceutical ingredients were found in drinking water supplies, resulting in ecological and health impacts. Pharmaceutical waste comes from a variety of sources. Hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare facilities, pharmaceutical companies and laboratories, veterinary clinics, retail pharmacies, and households are included among these [2].

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Over the last several decades, the worldwide health care system has seen immense increases in the manufacture, prescription, and use of drugs. Though this advancement has brought about enhanced disease control and mortality, it has also introduced an unavoidable rise in drug waste. Frequently not considered in discussions of waste management, drug waste has recently been identified as a specific and dangerous waste stream that is causing severe risks to environmental and public health. Pharmaceutical waste consists of a broad array of chemicals from unused and out-of-date drugs to discarded packaging, soiled items, and production residues [3]. These chemicals may find their way into the environment as a result of uncontrolled disposal practices like flushing medication down the toilet, open dumping, or burning without effective filtration. Active pharmaceutical ingredients can persist in soil and water, have undesirable effects on aquatic ecosystems, and have the potential to enter the food chain. In addition, traditional wastewater treatment technologies are usually not optimized to eliminate completely the residues of pharmaceuticals, enabling their repeated circulation in natural resources [4].

Pharmaceutical waste is linked to antimicrobial resistance. Routine environmental exposure to diluted doses of antibiotics and other medicines can lead to the emergence of resistant microbial populations, which compromise the efficacy of life-saving medications and complicate the course of infectious diseases. Hormonal drugs, cytotoxics, and psychotropics can also have toxic impacts on non-target organisms and disrupt normal biological processes. The significance and background of pharmaceutical waste go beyond contamination of the environment. They also include economic, social, and regulatory aspects. Complete knowledge of the sources and forms of pharmaceutical waste is thus a prerequisite to the development of effective segregation, handling, treatment, and disposal strategies [5].

SOURCES OF PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE

Pharmaceutical waste comes from an assortment of industries engaged in drug manufacturing, distribution, administration, and disposal. These sources present unique types and amounts of waste, frequently necessitating sophisticated handling and disposal procedures. It is necessary to identify these sources to develop effective waste management plans.

Healthcare Facilities

Healthcare centers, including hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic laboratories, are major contributors of pharmaceutical waste. These institutions produce waste products, such as expired medicines, half-used ampoules, intravenous fluids contaminated with drugs, unused tablets, ampoules broken and crushed, and drug-contaminated protective gear [6]. Much of this waste is a consequence of regimen changes, patient discharge before completion of medication courses, or the keeping of emergency drug supplies that are unlikely to be consumed prior to expiration [7]. Cytotoxic and cytostatic agents for oncology, narcotics, antibiotics, and hormone treatments are some of the most toxic materials produced in these settings. Their improper disposal, like flushing down a drain or commingling with normal waste, results in the contamination of hospital effluents that end up being discharged into municipal sewage systems [8]. The majority of wastewater treatment facilities are unable to screen out pharmaceutical residues, and as a result, active drug compounds end up being discharged into natural water bodies. Standardized protocols and training programs must be put in place to ensure safe, environmentally friendly waste disposal in such high-risk facilities [9].

Pharmaceutical Manufacturing

Pharmaceutical production facilities are another major contributor to pharmaceutical waste. These facilities generate waste at nearly every phase of drug production, such as synthesis, formulation, quality control testing, and packaging [10]. The waste produced could be active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), solvents, intermediates, degraded products, cleaning agents, and off-specification or rejected batches of drugs. The volumes of materials involved can be huge, particularly in production on a mass scale, where even a small fraction of rejected materials or spillage translates into huge quantities [11]. Inadequately treated industrial effluents have been found to discharge pharmaceutical compounds directly into surrounding rivers and lakes, resulting in intense concentrations of antibiotics, analgesics, and hormones within the environment. Such pollutants remain in the environment for extended periods, transform aquatic organisms, and stimulate the growth of resistant bacterial strains in water bodies

CHAPTER 2

Effects of Improper Pharmaceutical Waste Disposal

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Abstract: The substantial effects that inappropriate disposal of pharmaceutical waste has on ecosystems and public health have drawn more attention to the environmental effects of this practice. Pharmaceutical waste includes unwanted, outdated, or unused drugs that can be harmful if not disposed of properly. These materials are frequently improperly disposed of, which allows them to enter soil, water bodies, and the air. This contamination endangers aquatic life, terrestrial organisms, and human health. Data suggest that pharmaceutical residues, particularly those from antibiotics, and endocrine disruptors may negatively affect aquatic ecosystems, leading to antibiotic resistance and biodiversity loss. These substances, for example, can increase biological oxygen demand in water bodies, lowering oxygen levels that are vital for aquatic life. Environmentally Persistent Pharmaceutical Products (ERPs), which are medications that linger in the environment, can also interfere with wildlife's physiological functions, altering behavior and causing reproductive problems. Many nations lack comprehensive frameworks to address the complexities of pharmaceutical contamination, and the regulatory environment for pharmaceutical waste disposal is often insufficient. Unknowingly contributing to environmental degradation, many people treat pharmaceutical waste as regular household waste. The public's ignorance and lack of education about proper disposal practices exacerbate this issue. The problem is further compounded by research indicating that healthcare providers and community pharmacies frequently lack sufficient understanding of appropriate disposal techniques. Implementing robust waste management measures, such as public education campaigns, regulatory reforms, and the creation of appropriate disposal facilities, is crucial to reducing the environmental impacts of pharmaceutical waste. To encourage sustainable practices and lessen the environmental impact of pharmaceutical waste, legislators, healthcare professionals, and the general public must work together. Ultimately, a multifaceted approach to addressing the issues caused by pharmaceutical waste is needed, emphasizing public safety and environmental well-being.

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Suman Gautam, Jai Narayan Mishra, Preeti Mishra, Preeti Verma & Sudhanshu Mishra (Eds.)

Keywords: Antibiotic resistance (amr), Aquatic ecosystem toxicity, Biological oxygen demand (BOD), Endocrine-disrupting chemicals, Environmental contamination, Environmentally persistent pharmaceutical products (EPPS), Pharmaceutical waste disposal, Soil contamination, Water pollution from pharmaceuticals, Wildlife behavioral changes.

INTRODUCTION

Pharmaceutical waste refers to unused, expired, spilled, or contaminated pharmaceutical products, vaccines, drugs, and sera that are no longer needed and must be disposed of. These are acquired from various sources such as clinics, hospitals, pharmacies, veterinary clinics, and homes. They consist of different forms of materials—injectables, ointments, syrups, capsules, tablets, and even packs with drug residues. Increased use of drugs around the globe has been driven by population growth, aging, and rising health needs. Inadequate disposal and handling of drug waste pose a serious threat to environmental sustainability and human health. The pollutants in the wastes can be absorbed into the soil and water bodies, endangering terrestrial and aquatic life. Most active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) are meant to act on biological levels at low levels of concentration and can remain in the environment for long periods owing to their chemical stability. An example is antibiotics released into water bodies, which can disorganize microbial communities and further drive the development of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), an increasing concern worldwide. Hormonal drugs, such as estrogens, may be endocrine-disrupting chemicals, disrupting the reproductive cycles of aquatic organisms. Further, EPPP drugs can accumulate in the ecosystem and interfere with wildlife's physiological functioning, including altered mating behavior and reproductive defects. In light of these observations, the ecological effects of pharmaceutical waste are an immediate concern that necessitates an immediate response from scientists, doctors, regulators, and society in general [1].

CURRENT METHODS OF DISPOSAL

The practices adopted for the disposal of pharmaceutical waste today are extremely diverse, depending on the country's regulatory environment, infrastructure, and public awareness. The usual methods of disposal are landfilling, incineration, sewer disposal, and chemical treatment. All of these have their strengths and weaknesses regarding efficiency, cost, and environmental concerns [1].

LANDFILLING

Landfill disposal of drug waste is the most frequent. It is generally inexpensive and easy to accomplish, but it involves the danger of leachate creation. Water passes over rubbish and acts upon drug products to migrate into groundwater systems, where drugs become entrained within those aquifer systems to persist over extensive timeframes [1].

INCINERATION

High-temperature incineration is considered one of the most effective technologies for destroying drug compounds. Effective incinerators can minimize the environmental impact of toxic waste. But when operated under suboptimal conditions, it can emit harmful air pollutants such as dioxins and furans. Operation of incineration plants is extremely expensive, hence an unsustainable option in the majority of developing countries [1].

SEWER DISPOSAL

Unused or expired drugs are, in certain cases, discarded by flushing them down sinks or toilets, especially in residential areas and small clinics. Such practice is highly discouraged because wastewater treatment plants cannot destroy complex drug residues. This causes the pollution of rivers, lakes, and sources of water [1].

CHEMICAL DEACTIVATION AND ENCAPSULATION

Some institutions dispose of drug waste, especially cytotoxic and harmful drugs, by using chemical neutralization technology or encapsulation. These techniques work but depend heavily on qualified professionals and adequate facilities. Even though such processes are available, the lack of uniform regulations and enforcement in most places has resulted in unequal practices. Lack of public awareness, poor segregation at the source, and inadequate disposal facilities aggravate the situation, resulting in ongoing environmental pollution. Therefore, concerted action through improved public education, green disposal methods, and rigorous regulation is needed to prevent the adverse environmental consequences of pharmaceutical waste [1].

CONTAMINATION PATHWAYS IN THE ENVIRONMENT

The Contamination of Water

The problem of water pollution from the wrong disposal of pharmaceutical waste is becoming a serious environmental issue deserving serious academic scrutiny. Pharmaceutical waste, including unused or expired drugs, tends to be disposed of improperly by community households and health centers. Because of inadequate dumping procedures, toxic chemicals become part of the water sources and hence present hazards to life in the waters and human well-being [2, 3].

CHAPTER 3

Classification of Hazardous *vs.* Non-Hazardous Pharmaceutical Waste

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Abstract: Pharmaceutical discard management is essential to protecting the environment and public health. Improper disposal of pharmaceutical waste can pose risks to public health, expose people to harmful compounds, and cause ecological damage. This paper divides pharmaceutical waste into hazardous and non-hazardous categories, highlighting the significance of proper disposal procedures. This study aims to examine the standards for differentiating between hazardous and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste, as well as the consequences of improper waste disposal. Chemotherapy agents and regulated compounds are examples of hazardous pharmaceutical waste, which include materials that are toxic, contagious, or environmentally hazardous. Materials that do not present serious risks, such as unused vitamins and over-the-counter medications, are classified as non-hazardous trash. The current literature and regulatory recommendations from organizations like the EPA and WHO were reviewed using a qualitative approach. The study pinpoints important classification criteria, such as physical characteristics, chemical makeup, and legal requirements. The results demonstrate that incorrect classification can lead to contaminated environments and higher medical expenses. Clear rules and adherence to best practices for both hazardous and non-hazardous items are necessary for the efficient handling of pharmaceutical waste. Improved safety in hospital settings, reduced environmental contamination, and more effective waste management systems are among the future benefits of better classification. To reduce dangers and advance sustainable pharmaceutical waste management practices globally, more research and more stringent enforcement of waste disposal regulations are necessary.

Keywords: Chemotherapy agents, Environmentally hazardous, Hazardous, Non-hazardous.

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Suman Gautam, Jai Narayan Mishra, Preeti Mishra, Preeti Verma & Sudhanshu Mishra (Eds.)

INTRODUCTION

Medicines that are thrown away, unused, or expired, as well as objects that come into contact with them, are all considered pharmaceutical waste. Pharmaceutical trash can come from homes, clinics, hospitals, pharmacies, and healthcare facilities [1]. The environment, animals, and human health can all be seriously endangered by improper disposal of these items. To guarantee safe disposal and lessen the influence on the environment, this trash must be properly classified [2]**.**

To safeguard the environment and public health, medicinal waste management is crucial. Because inappropriate handling and disposal of pharmaceutical waste can be dangerous, there are strict standards governing its classification and disposal. Hazardous or non-hazardous waste are the two main classifications into which pharmaceutical waste falls. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the complexities of pharmaceutical waste classification, with particular attention to the distinctions between hazardous and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste, the classification criteria, and the importance of appropriate disposal procedures [3].

It can be challenging to know what to do with the many types of hazardous and non-hazardous waste that industries produce. The 7.6 billion tons of industrial trash produced annually in the US must be disposed of somewhere. However, what kinds of garbage are there, and how should they be handled? This guide covers the distinction between hazardous and non-hazardous waste, the many forms of hazardous waste, examples of each category, how to identify whether your company generates hazardous waste, and advice on what to do about it [4].

Pharmaceutical waste is divided into hazardous and non-hazardous categories (Fig. **1**) to help select appropriate disposal methods and ensure compliance with environmental laws. Because hazardous pharmaceutical waste is poisonous, corrosive, flammable, or reactive, it directly endangers both human well-being and the environment. Non-hazardous pharmaceutical excess is less dangerous, but it still needs to be properly disposed of [5].

HAZARDOUS PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE

The term "hazardous pharmaceutical waste" describes pharmaceutical materials or products whose chemical makeup makes them hazardous to the environment or human health. Medications and toxic, flammable, corrosive, or reactive compounds are examples of these. To avoid exposure, contamination, and injury, hazardous pharmaceutical waste needs to be handled, stored, and disposed of carefully [6].

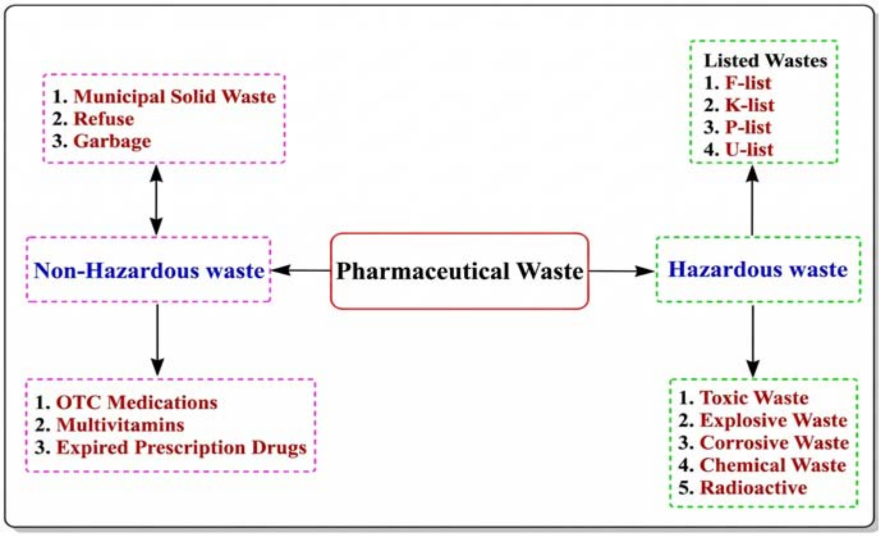

Fig. (1). Types of hazardous waste besides non-hazardous waste.

Hazardous pharmaceutical waste is any pharmaceutical material that meets the requirements established by regulatory agencies for hazardous waste.

Waste items generated during pharmaceutical manufacturing, research, and clinical settings, as well as unused or terminated medicines, can all be classified as hazardous pharmaceutical waste. Harmful waste is defined as waste that poses a substantial risk to human well-being or the environment if inappropriately disposed of. A material is categorized as dangerous waste by the EPA if it is on a particular list of hazardous discarded materials or if it possesses the known characteristics of hazardous waste. Hazardous waste is governed by the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) [7].

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF HAZARDOUS PHARMACEUTICAL WASTES

Toxicity:

Substances that can cause long-term health problems or environmental impact when consumed, breathed, or absorbed by the body. Because of their mutagenic or carcinogenic qualities, toxic medications, including chemotherapeutic medicines, are frequently regarded as dangerous. When toxic waste is consumed or absorbed by living things, it can cause harm. Toxic wastes are found in many hazardous pharmaceutical wastes. Chloroform, Mercury, cadmium, arsenic, selenium, chromium, barium, m-cresol, lindane, mercury, or silver are commonly found in toxic medications [8].

CHAPTER 4

Physical and Chemical Processes Involved in Recycling Pharmaceutical Waste

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Abstract: Pharmaceutical industries are essential for the survival of any contemporary society, as their products are crucial to the health and well-being of the general public. However, the waste generated by these industries has become a significant concern due to its detrimental effects on ecosystems and human health. This issue is particularly pronounced in many developing nations, where pharmaceutical waste is often carelessly dumped into the environment, resulting in inadequate handling or treatment. Pharmaceuticals can enter the environment through various pathways, including the discharge of treated wastewater, leakage from landfills, sewer lines, runoff from animal waste, and the application of manure fertilizers to agricultural land. Pharmaceutical waste contains high concentrations of organic matter, microbial toxicants, salt, and non-biodegradable substances. Due to limited resources, it is essential to develop methodologies for treating pharmaceutical waste. The current approaches to the treatment and disposal of pharmaceutical waste are the main subject of this review, which aims to classify the treatment techniques into clearly defined categories. It highlights the related benefits and drawbacks of both established and new approaches, as well as the difficulties in resolving the latter.

Given the wide range of contaminants and the low success rates of current technologies, it is evident that no single traditional method can adequately address the risks associated with pharmaceutical waste discharges. On the other hand, some more contemporary technologies, such as membrane-integrated hybrid technologies, are starting to outperform traditional ones. However, confidence in scaling up these novel technologies remains low and must be significantly bolstered through pilot-scale research using real pharmaceutical waste rather than synthetic alternatives. The suggestions from the analysis will aid in the recycling and treatment of pharmaceutical waste generated by the pharmaceutical sector.

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Keywords: Environment, Hybrid technologies, Pharmaceutical waste, Recycling, Waste management.

INTRODUCTION

Pharmaceutical waste (PW) is primarily collected at its point of origin and is often disposed of comprehensively as part of healthcare waste (HCW). Pharmaceutical waste, as stated by the World Health Organization (WHO), is a healthcare product labeled beyond its service date or a product that no longer meets medical needs and that also contains polluting substances [1]. Therefore, the distinct chemical properties and persistent hazards of PWs make them individually nano or micro-spiked from other healthcare waste materials, and they need their own distinctive 'Hazardous Waste Pharmaceuticals' colored tag or different 'PHRM code' to identify in the healthcare waste management process [2]. The four-character PHRM code established by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 40 CFR part 266, subpart P, was designed by HCFs to do off-site sending of non-creditable hazardous PWs under the shipping permit. The four-character 'PHRM' code replaced the previous six-character 'PHARMS' code, per USEPA December 19th circular [3]. Pharmaceutical products have a network of chemical ingredients, comprising active pharmaceutical ingredients and numerous excipients. PWs with hazardous properties also meet all USEPA hazardous drug criteria, in addition to their corrosiveness, reactivity, and toxicity [4].

With advancements in medical technology, population growth, and improved healthcare systems, global medicine usage has become widespread. Doctors predict that new medicine brands will account for over $165 billion of this amount, driving medical expense growth at an annual rate of 2–5 percent to reach $1.1 trillion by 2024. In 2019, patients worldwide completed 1.8 trillion days of therapy, averaging 234 days per person. Wasted or expiring medicines, also known as CUE medicine, are disposed of at $790 per ton in the USA and $£450 per ton in the UK [5]. Every year, in the UK, patients take medicines without a physician's prescription or without authorization from the National Health Service, resulting in wasted medicines valued at over £300 million [6]. The United States stated that an assessment of two-thirds of the prescriptions provided to patients found that their medication would remain unused. Due to limited documentation on medicine use and disposal patterns in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), researchers are, in some senses, able to relate to findings from high-income countries. The German health sector is expecting pharmaceuticals to grow at a range of 40% to 70% in the next three decades. The two problems caused by medicine use in human and animal populations, relate to this. It is anticipated that global veterinary antibiotic use for disease treatment, farming, or growth promotion will rise by 67% by 2030. Pharmaceutical use can also be increased by overprescribing in hospitals and clinics, consumer self-medication, early termination or change of treatment due to misdiagnosis, and other causes, whether medically justified or not [7].

PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE

Roughly, the pharmaceutical industry wastewater can be classified according to its sources as: a) municipal wastewater; b) spent liquors from the fermentation process; c); chemical wastes; d) condenser wastes from evaporation, and e) floor and laboratory washing waste. During the biotechnological production of pharmaceutical chemicals, such as buffers, chelators, and antibiotics, used as ancillary substances, these substances are discharged into the water biotope, resulting in the accumulation of harmful chemicals in soil and water. Though estimated to be as low as 15-20%, recent studies confirm that 20-35% of medicines used in hospitals are potentially bioaccumulative. Consequently, the pseudo-persistence and ecotoxicological impacts of continuously discharged pharmaceutically active compounds (PhACs)—the primary harmful constituents—must also be considered. Most PhACs are complex molecules that are polar in nature, having molecular weights in the range of 200 to 1000 Da. Due to their specific biological activity, they are widely used in drug applications [8]. Pharmaceutical waste can be divided into two categories to facilitate the identification of available treatment methods and the development of systematic policies for environmentally friendly, minimal waste discharge.

a) Secondary wastes from medicinal companies and the treatment and recycling plants; and b) the medical wastes from hospitals and the domestic sector contaminate the sewage systems significantly. The second type of waste is sources that cause active pharmaceutical residues to enter public sewers and, thus, municipal wastewater treatment plants, which are often poorly equipped to handle these specific types of waste [9].

Some guidelines on the management of PWs produced by pharmaceutical industries, hospitals, clinics, research laboratories, and domestic sources suggest that the solid and semi-solid PWs should be treated by incineration/pyrolysis, encapsulation, and amortization or engineered landfill, respectively, whereas the liquid PWs should be treated in a wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) [10]. However, there are some controversies on the applicability of the said guidelines in the management of pharmaceutical waste (PWM). Discrepancies in recommendations for techniques such as incineration, encapsulation, and sanitary landfilling—where one guideline or study endorses them while others label them as “partially recommended” or “not recommended”—may arise because these

CHAPTER 5

Novel Recycling Technologies for Pharmaceutical Waste

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Abstract: Innovative recycling techniques should focus on pharmaceutical waste since sustainable environmental practices have become a major global issue. Pharmaceuticals pose substantial dangers to both the environment and public health because improper disposal of these substances remains widespread. Standard pharmaceutical waste disposal practices, such as landfilling and incineration, are inefficient for both waste management and sustainability. Modern recycling technologies offer genuine solutions to control pharmaceutical waste while promoting sustainability initiatives. The purpose of these technological methods is to extract important compounds, including excipients alongside active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and additional bioactive components from discarded medications. Modern methods of solvent extraction, chemical reprocessing and biocatalytic breakdown processes separate pharmaceutical waste into reusable components. The research addresses the development of membrane filtration and adsorption technologies as advanced filtration techniques to recover valuable resources while achieving purification. Companies are exploring the development of waste monitoring systems that combine waste identification along with recycling methods through advanced AI and IoT technologies. Innovative recycling methods convert waste materials into useful resources, helping reduce environmental degradation from pharmaceutical waste while establishing circular economic systems. A comprehensive discussion of modern pharmaceutical waste recycling methods appears in this section, followed by a review of both existing possibilities and future expectations within this nascent discipline.

Keywords: Active pharmaceutical ingredients, Environmental sustainability, Pharmaceutical waste, Recycling technologies, Waste management.

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INTRODUCTION

The term pharmaceutical waste includes expired medications, unused medications and unwanted pharmaceutical items, including chemicals and non-pharmaceutical materials that have lost their use because they have either expired or gone unused or are unwanted by users. Multiple areas, including healthcare institutions, clinics and pharmacies, and domestic spaces, generate this type of waste. Poor pharmaceutical waste management produces multiple environmental threats, such as water contamination and ecological damage, because it allows drugs to affect wildlife and creates drug-resistant microorganisms [1].

Handling pharmaceutical waste is a vital practice because it safeguards human health while protecting the environment from harmful effects. A series of procedures exists to properly identify hazardous pharmaceuticals before safely separating them for disposal, which follows governmental regulations. The growing pharmaceutical industry poses significant challenges for effective pharmaceutical waste management. Strategies that focus on pharmaceutical waste management need to become standard practice because they reduce the environmental impacts while making medicine use both safe and sustainable [2].

Standard waste management methods for pharmaceuticals aim to reduce both environmental pollution and public health risks. The disposal process applies to medications across three categories: expired products, unused materials and substances contaminated with contamination, and production scraps. The following list contains the most typical techniques used for pharmaceutical waste management.

INCINERATION

Incineration is one of the most reliable methods for healthcare facilities to dispose of hazardous pharmaceutical waste, expired drugs, cytotoxic (chemotherapy) waste, and controlled substances by burning them at high temperatures for safe decomposition into nontoxic byproducts.

Pre-Incineration Steps

A separation process arranges hazardous pharmaceutical waste (such as chemotherapy drugs along with antibiotics) separately from all other waste streams. The waste undergoes proper packaging in burnable sealed containers while abstaining from using PVC containers because they release dioxins during the process [2]. The collected waste travels to professional facilities for sanctioned incineration services.

Incineration Stages

The incineration process occurs in distinct temperature-dependent stages, each serving a critical function in waste treatment (Table **1**).

Table 1. Different stages of incineration [3].

Stage	Temperature	Process
Drying & Ignition	200–400°C	Moisture evaporates; waste starts burning.
Primary Combustion	850–1,000°C	Organic compounds break down into gases and ash.
Secondary Combustion	1,100–1,200°C	Toxic gases (*e.g.*, dioxins) are further oxidized.
Flue Gas Treatment	≥ 1200°C	Scrubbing removes acidic gases (HCl, SO_2), and filters capture particulate matter.
Ash Disposal	1200–1600°C	Residual ash (non-hazardous) is landfilled or used in construction.

Types of Incinerators for Pharmaceutical Waste

Table **2** compares four primary incinerator types used for pharmaceutical waste treatment, outlining their optimal applications, advantages, and disadvantages.

Table 2. Different types of incinerators [4].

Type	Best For	Advantages	Disadvantages
Rotary Kiln	Hazardous, liquid, solid waste	High efficiency, handles diverse waste	High cost, complex maintenance
Static Hearth	Small-scale medical waste	Simple operation	Lower temperature range
Fluidized Bed	Powder/liquid waste	Uniform burning, low emissions	Not for large, solid items
Pyrolysis/Gasification	Advanced treatment	Energy recovery, fewer emissions	Expensive, limited availability

Advantages of Incineration

- **Complete Destruction:** Eliminates toxic drugs (*e.g.*, chemotherapy agents, opioids).
- **Volume Reduction:** Converts waste into sterile ash (90% less volume).
- **Pathogen Elimination:** Kills bacteria, viruses, and prions.
- **Energy Recovery:** Some plants convert heat into electricity (Waste-to-Energy).

CHAPTER 6

The Role of the Pharmaceutical Industry in Sustainable Waste Recycling

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Abstract: This chapter critically analyses the pharmaceutical sector's evolving role in green waste recycling practice. The pharmaceutical industry is shifting away from conventional waste management methods toward circular economy models that emphasise resource recovery and environmental responsibility. We examine ongoing recycling efforts across various pharmaceutical waste streams, including production residues, expired drugs, packaging materials, and laboratory consumables. Novel technologies that facilitate the recovery of valuable compounds, solvents, and rare materials from pharmaceutical waste receive specific attention here. Regulatory regimes vary considerably across regions, and we assess how industry influence, economic incentives, and implementation challenges shape current practice. Case studies highlight industry success stories, outline best practices, and document measurable environmental gains. Our discussion concludes by proposing a forward-looking framework for the recycling of pharmaceutical waste. This framework considers ecological protection, resource conservation, public health concerns, and economic viability while offering pragmatic suggestions for industry actors, policymakers, and researchers working in this space.

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Keywords: Circular economy, Environmental risk mitigation, Environmental stewardship, Extended producer responsibility, Green pharmacy, Life cycle assessment, Medication take-back programs, Resource recovery, Sustainable manufacturing, Zero-waste initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Fundamentally rooted in drug discovery, development, and therapeutic delivery, the pharmaceutical industry sustains modern healthcare by advancing human and animal health while addressing environmental concerns that affect the planet. Its contributions to life extension and quality-of-life enhancement remain indisputable. Nevertheless, this essential sector simultaneously generates substantial pharmaceutical waste streams, a reality often overshadowed in discourse despite its significance for operational sustainability. These waste matrices encompass manufacturing residues, expired pharmaceuticals and therapeutics, depleted inventory, and protective packaging systems (primarily blister pack configurations) designed to maintain product stability and bioavailability before clinical administration. Inadequate or inappropriate disposal practices pose multifaceted environmental and ecological hazards, with documented impacts on aquatic ecosystems, terrestrial biodiversity, and both animal and human health trajectories (Fig. **1**). Consequently, sustainable recycling technologies and methodologies have emerged as critical imperatives. This chapter examines the pharmaceutical industry's pivotal role in advancing sustainable waste-stream recovery and resource-recirculation strategies [1].

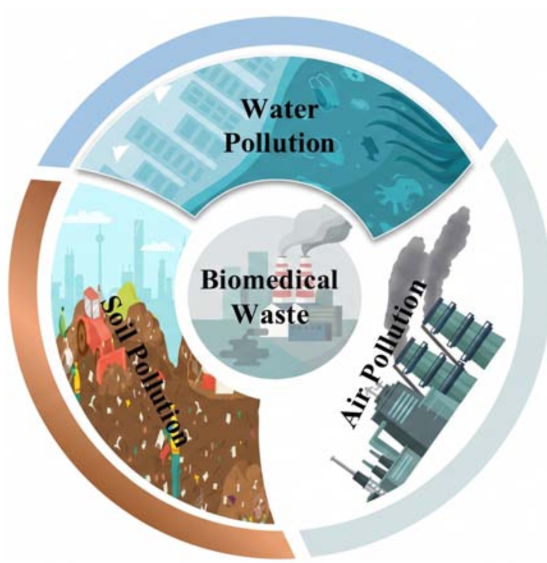

Fig. (1). Types of pollution caused by pharmaceutical waste.

THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE: UNDERSTANDING PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE GENERATION

A comprehensive understanding of pharmaceutical waste sources is essential for designing effective recycling strategies. The pharmaceutical product lifecycle, spanning manufacture through disposal, presents multiple points at which waste is generated. Specifically, pharmaceutical waste streams (Fig. **2**) emerge at distinct stages throughout the product lifecycle, from initial production phases to final end-of-life management [2].

Fig. (2). Types of pharmaceutical waste.

Sources of Pharmaceutical Waste Across the Value Chain

Pharmaceutical products generate substantial waste throughout their entire supply chain, from the synthesis and manufacturing of active pharmaceutical ingredients to distribution networks, clinical administration, and ultimate end-of-life management.

Manufacturing Facilities

Pharmaceutical manufacturing is a multi-stage process that encompasses the synthesis of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), the integration of excipients, drug formulation, and rigorous quality assurance protocols. This complex operational framework generates both inevitable byproducts and intentional disposal outputs, resulting in various streams of pharmaceutical waste. API manufacturing, in particular, produces substantial solvent residues, unreacted process intermediates, and batch failures due to stringent quality control specifications. The heterogeneous nature of pharmaceutical waste necessitates specialised handling and disposal methodologies to prevent environmental contamination and subsequent bioaccumulation through aquatic ecosystems and

CHAPTER 7

Role of Advanced Technologies in Transforming Pharmaceutical Waste Management

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Abstract: Managing pharmaceutical waste is a significant challenge to environmental integrity and public health, necessitating innovative ways to mitigate its adverse effects. The advancement of innovative technology has fundamentally transformed the management, recycling, and disposal of pharmaceutical waste, offering efficient and sustainable alternatives. Emerging technologies such as bioremediation, nanotechnology, green chemistry, artificial intelligence (AI), and machine learning (ML) are transforming the management of pharmaceutical waste. Nanotechnology offers innovative materials for effective waste filtration and degradation, while artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) facilitate predictive modelling and optimisation of waste management systems. Green chemistry minimises hazardous waste generation by promoting the development of biodegradable excipients and eco-friendly pharmaceutical formulations. Moreover, pharmaceutical contaminants can be ecologically detoxified by bioremediation techniques utilising microorganisms and enzymes. The integration of blockchain and the Internet of Things (IoT) enhances waste disposal systems by improving transparency, traceability, and regulatory compliance. This chapter examines the advancements, challenges, and prospects of technology-driven pharmaceutical waste management, emphasising the importance of global collaboration and innovative legislation to ensure environmental sustainability and public health safety.

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Keywords: Advanced technologies, Artificial intelligence, Bioremediation, Green chemistry, Machine learning, Nanotechnology, Pharmaceutical waste management.

INTRODUCTION

The management of pharmaceutical waste is an increasing concern due to the escalating global consumption of medications and the associated threats to human health and the environment. Inappropriate disposal of expired, unused, or contaminated medications can result in water contamination, antimicrobial resistance, and ecological disruption. Advanced technologies are crucial for transforming conventional waste management systems into more efficient, safer, and more sustainable processes to tackle these difficulties. Pharmaceutical products can be intelligently tracked throughout their lifecycle thanks to digital technologies like Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) and the Internet of Things (IoT). These systems make it easier to monitor trash generation, disposal, storage, and segregation in real time. These technologies are used by hospitals and the pharmaceutical industry to make sure that hazardous and non-hazardous wastes are handled correctly and in compliance with regulations. Despite its effectiveness, manual waste sorting is losing efficiency as garbage quantities rise and human resources become scarcer. Resource recovery and recyclability are improved by source segregation, especially into wet and dry streams. Wet waste, which is often turned into compost or biogas, can be used as a source of energy and as a substitute for artificial fertilisers. It is possible to recycle or reuse metallic waste. Source segregation guarantees better material quality for recycling, lowering transportation expenses and occupational hazards even in the face of industrial segregators. Alternative techniques, including pre-shredding or sensor-based sorting, are being researched to deal with excessive garbage. For high waste quantities, sensor-based sorting presents a viable option. The installation of smart dustbins offers a practical and affordable way to separate waste in homes and public areas. These bins move waste to the proper containers for direct processing by using sensors to differentiate between wet and dry waste according to moisture content. Smart dustbins simplify garbage management by automating the sorting process, encouraging recycling, and lowering the need for manual sorting. By guaranteeing premium materials for recycling and reducing the amount of waste dumped in landfills or incinerators, this strategy improves resource recovery and environmental sustainability. It also maximises the use of available resources and lessens reliance on physical effort, which helps create a waste management system that is more sustainable and effective (Fig. **1**) [1, 2].

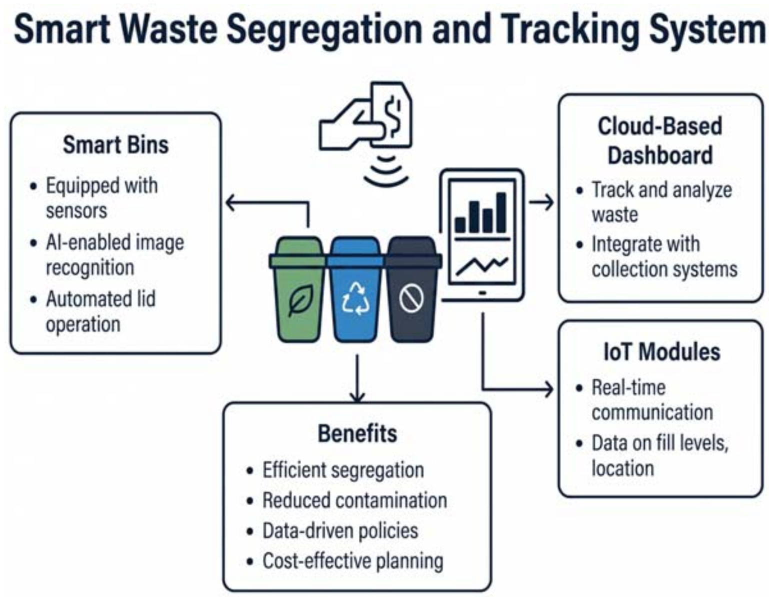

Fig. (1). Smart waste segregation and tracking systems.

ADVANCED OXIDATION PROCESSES (AOPS)

AOPs are being used more and more to break down complex pharmaceutical chemicals in wastewater, such as ozonation, photocatalysis, and Fenton reactions. These techniques produce extremely reactive hydroxyl radicals, which decompose persistent organic contaminants into innocuous byproducts such as carbon dioxide and water. AOPs are particularly good at treating hospital and pharmaceutical industrial effluents.

Due to urbanisation, industrialisation, and the overuse of chemicals, water pollution has emerged as one of the world's most urgent environmental issues. The removal of heavy metals, dyes, pharmaceuticals, persistent organic pollutants (POPs), and other new contaminants is frequently beyond the scope of conventional water and wastewater treatment methods. Advanced Oxidation Processes (AOPs) have become strong and promising technologies for the degradation and mineralisation of a variety of hazardous pollutants in aqueous systems in order to overcome these restrictions.

The *in situ* production of extremely reactive species, mainly hydroxyl radicals (•OH), which can non-selectively attack and degrade complex organic compounds into innocuous byproducts like water, carbon dioxide, and inorganic ions, is what defines AOPs [2].

CHAPTER 8

Pharmaceutical Waste Management in Healthcare Facilities: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract: Pharmaceutical waste comprises several waste streams that reflect the variety and complexity of substances used in pharmaceuticals. Several activities within a healthcare institution may generate pharmaceutical waste, including intravenous (IV) preparation, general compounding, spills or breakages, partially used vials and syringes, abandoned or unused preparations, patients' prescriptions, and expired pharmaceuticals. Except for chemotherapy medications, which are regularly moved to a regulated medical waste incinerator, pharmaceutical waste at hospitals is typically disposed of in landfills. Legislation about hazardous waste was not well understood when these processes were developed. Additionally, certain medications have hazardous properties that make them challenging to manage without the required procedures and tools. The lack of precise standards for identifying pharmaceutical waste is one of the biggest challenges, leading to disparate disposal methods across medical institutions. Often, healthcare workers receive inadequate training in waste segregation, leading to the mixing of hazardous and non-hazardous waste. Waste management's operational and financial costs are another difficulty, particularly for smaller organizations with little funding. Healthcare organizations should develop comprehensive waste management strategies that address these issues by implementing ecologically safe disposal methods, proper waste segregation, and staff training. Working together with competent waste management companies may ensure that pharmaceutical waste is handled appropriately and in compliance with regional regulations.

Keywords: Hazardous, Health care, Pharmaceutical waste, Waste management.

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INTRODUCTION

Pharmaceutical waste management involves the appropriate handling, storage, treatment, and disposal of pharmaceutical products and drugs that are no longer required, are considered dangerous, or have expired. To minimize adverse impacts on human health, pharmaceutical waste management in hospital settings must be done effectively. As healthcare processes get more complicated and the amount of pharmaceutical waste increases, it becomes difficult to dispose of these materials safely [1]. Hospitals, pharmacies, and long-term care facilities are among the healthcare facilities that produce various kinds of pharmaceutical waste, including hazardous chemicals, controlled substances, and unused or expired medication. Keeping a clean and safe hospital environment requires that pharmaceutical waste be disposed of properly. Since the development of contemporary medical therapies, patients are routinely prescribed and given medications. Waste gets produced if these medications are unused, broken, or expired. Hospitals accumulate unnecessary pharmaceuticals owing to the need for specialized drugs, and these drugs need to be disposed of safely. Pharmaceutical waste must be managed properly for the environment and public health to be protected, as well as for healthcare institutions to operate safely [1]. Serious repercussions may result from improper disposal of pharmaceutical waste. Air, soil, and water sources may get contaminated when narcotics are handled or disposed of improperly. When discharged into the environment, many pharmaceutical compounds may have long-lasting effects on aquatic life, ecosystems, and perhaps human populations, making environmental issues serious. Inadequate disposal may also result in the misuse of controlled medications, such as opioids, which can be used for drug addiction and abuse [2]. Therefore, healthcare facilities must manage pharmaceutical waste according to the best standards to reduce these dangers.

Regulatory frameworks are essential to the management of pharmaceutical waste. To guarantee the safe disposal of pharmaceutical waste, a number of national and international organizations provide policies and procedures. Hazardous pharmaceutical waste is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the United States following the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). Regarding the disposal of outdated medications, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) also establishes regulations [3]. Under the Secure and Responsible Drug Disposal Act, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is also in charge of managing the disposal of restricted narcotics [4]. In both industrialized and developing nations, the World Health Organization (WHO) offers guidelines for managing pharmaceutical waste, particularly concerning waste reduction and ecologically friendly disposal methods.

Many healthcare institutions still struggle to manage pharmaceutical waste in an efficient manner in spite of these rules. Inadequate infrastructure, a lack of employee training, and the high expenses of putting in place acceptable disposal procedures are some of these difficulties. Furthermore, there is often a misunderstanding about the classification of pharmaceutical waste, especially concerning what qualifies as prohibited or hazardous compounds. In order to guarantee that the right procedures are followed, this emphasizes the need for thorough waste management systems and ongoing training for healthcare personnel [5]. Healthcare providers must implement strong pharmaceutical waste management plans that put public health, environmental preservation, and legal compliance first in light of these difficulties. Clear waste segregation guidelines, safe pharmaceutical storage, and the use of authorized disposal techniques like incineration or reverse distribution schemes are all a part of this. The objective is to reduce the hazards related to pharmaceutical waste while maintaining the safe and effective functioning of medical facilities [5].

TYPES OF PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE

There are many categories into which pharmaceutical waste at healthcare institutions may be divided, each with specific disposal needs and legal constraints. Non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste, hazardous pharmaceutical waste, regulated substances, infectious pharmaceutical waste, and unused or expired medications are the main categories of pharmaceutical waste [6]. To ensure that pharmaceutical waste is handled and disposed of appropriately, minimizing hazards to the environment, human health, and safety, it is crucial to comprehend the different categories of pharmaceutical waste. Fig. (**1**) shows different types of pharmaceutical waste.

Pharmaceutical Non-Hazardous Waste

Medications and pharmaceutical items that do not fit the definition of hazardous waste under laws like the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) in the United States or comparable frameworks in other nations are referred to as non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste. When disposed of properly, these medications do not present a serious risk to the environment or public health. Examples of non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste include: Over-the-counter drugs: Typical drugs include antacids, allergy treatments, and painkillers. Supplements and vitamins: Goods with non-toxic, non-hazardous components. Topical creams and ointments: Non-toxic drugs used topically to treat mild skin irritations.

CHAPTER 9

Sustainable and Eco-Friendly Packaging: A Pathway to Better Recycling

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Abstract: As global environmental challenges intensify, sustainable, eco-friendly packaging emerges as a pivotal solution to mitigate ecological degradation and promote circular economies. This chapter examines the complex intersection of material innovation, waste management, and recycling efficiency within the context of sustainable packaging systems. It examines advanced materials, including biodegradable polymers, plant-based alternatives, and recyclable composites, alongside their role in reducing dependence on single-use plastics. Furthermore, it critically analyzes the integration of circular design principles, emphasizing material longevity, reusability, and recyclability while assessing the limitations and opportunities within current recycling infrastructures. By investigating the systemic changes required in packaging design, production, and post-consumer processing, this chapter argues that eco-friendly packaging, when coupled with robust recycling frameworks, can catalyze a more sustainable, closed-loop economy. Ultimately, it underscores the transformative potential of sustainable packaging as a key driver for both environmental and economic resilience in the face of escalating resource scarcity and pollution.

Keywords: Biodegradable, Bioplastic, Biopolymer, Eco-friendly packaging, Ecological degradation, Plastic, Pollution, Recycle, Sustainable packaging, Waste management.

INTRODUCTION

The technology, science, and art of packaging are used to successfully present, preserve, and protect goods for consumers [1]. The materials (Pharmaceutical packaging) are the assemblage of varying components that surround a pharmaceutical product from the time of manufacture until it is used. It offers identification presentation, protection, information, as well as convenience at a fair price from the duration of manufacture until it is utilized. The type of pharma-

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Suman Gautam, Jai Narayan Mishra, Preeti Mishra, Preeti Verma & Sudhanshu Mishra (Eds.)

ceutical packaging used depends on the substance and its intended application. Ultimately, research on the stability, storage, sterilization, and testing of specific materials must be conducted to evaluate each packing material. The packaging supports and plays a critical role in maintaining the eminence of therapeutic goods [2].

Sustainable packaging refers to the design, materials, and processes used to create packaging that minimizes environmental impact during its life cycle. The goal is to reduce the ecological footprint of packaging from production to disposal, thereby preserving natural resources and reducing waste. Sustainable packaging supports the principles of reduce, reuse, and recycle while striving to minimize carbon emissions, water usage, and other environmental harms.

Eco-friendly packaging is a subset of sustainable packaging, specifically focused on materials and practices that are not harmful to the environment. Eco-friendly packaging can include recyclable, biodegradable, compostable, or reusable materials. It aims to minimize consumption of non-renewable resources, reduce waste, and lower the pollution associated with packaging production and disposal.

KEY PRINCIPLES [3]

- **Life Cycle Thinking**: Sustainable packaging is designed with its complete life cycle in mind, from fresh material sourcing to end-of-life disposal. The goal is to minimize negative environmental impacts at every stage.
- **Resource Efficiency**: Efficient use of materials, energy, and water in production. Sustainable packaging seeks to reduce waste through efficient design, manufacturing, and transportation processes.
- **Design for Reuse/Recycle**: Packaging should be designed to facilitate reuse or recycling. This includes using single materials, minimizing additives, and making it easier for consumers to dispose of it correctly.

FUNCTIONS OF PACKAGING

- **Barrier Protection** - It serves as a defense against unfavorable external factors that could alter the product’s characteristics, such as moisture, light, oxygen, and temperature. Blister packing (pharmaceutical-grade barrier films along with eco-friendly halogenated adhesives that protect the pharmaceutical product from the time of production until the time of free films) can offer this kind of protection.
- **Biological Protection** – It is intended for the defense against biological toxins.
- **Physical Protection** – It is intended for the protection of the pharmaceutical dosage forms against bodily damage.
- **Identification** – It is meant for the proof of identity of the products.

- **Security** - Certain characteristics of pharmaceutical packaging guard against counterfeiting. Additionally, it keeps young children from using the formulation's contents.
- **Convenience** – Packaging needs to be adequate to increase consumer interaction with the products and advance their handling, distribution, sale, and use.

TRADITIONAL MATERIALS USED FOR PACKAGING

Plastic

Because plastics are useful and versatile materials, they can be used for carrying and storing complex instruments, medications, and other medical apparatus. In the health care industry, plastic containers are commonplace. These consist of overwrap, thermoformed blister packs, in addition to trays, vials, bags, pouches, and caps. Synthetic materials, which are frequently oil-based and nonbiodegradable polymers, make up the majority of plastic packaging employed in daily life. Pharmaceutical packaging uses conventional plastics made from non-renewable petroleum-based oils, such as polypropylene, polyethylene, polytetrafluoroethylene, and polyvinyl chloride [4].

These synthetic polymers are most frequently used in pharmaceutical packaging applications due to their exceptional strength, chemical resistance, and lightweight nature [5]. However, sorption, leaching, permeability, chemical responsiveness, and alteration of the properties of the products or plastics are the drawbacks of using plastic materials for pharmaceutical packaging [6]. It takes several decades for these plastics to break down, and as they do, harmful compounds are released. The need to find appropriate alternatives, such as bioplastics with comparable physico-chemical properties to petroleum-based plastics, is increasingly recognized in light of the detrimental effects of conventional plastics.

Tin Plate

The low-carbon steel used to make the tinplate has thin tin coatings applied to both sides. Aerosol containers and packaging closures are commonly made with it. It can be recycled frequently into novel packaging products without losing quality, and it is less expensive than aluminium. It is durable and formable, has a longer shelf life for the dosage form, is appropriate for printing and graphics, provides better barrier protection, is retortable, and, above all, is environmentally friendly [7].

CHAPTER 10

Role of Digitalization and Green Technology in Waste Management

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Abstract: The growing volume of waste generated by industrialization and urbanization poses serious environmental and public health problems. Green technology and digitization have evolved into revolutionary waste management solutions that optimize resources, enhance sustainability, and improve efficiency. The use of smart technologies in waste monitoring, collection, sorting, and recycling, such as blockchain, artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), Real-time tracking and predictive modeling are made possible by digital tools such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), cloud computing, and data analytics, which maximize waste disposal and reduce environmental impacts. Sustainable waste management techniques are also aided by green technologies, including waste-to-energy conversion, biodegradable materials, and circular economy models. Resource recovery is encouraged and reliance on landfills is reduced through digitalization in smart garbage bins, automated segregation systems, and decentralized recycling procedures. Furthermore, legislative frameworks and international case studies demonstrate how well digital and green interventions perform to accomplish sustainable waste management objectives. In order to achieve environmental sustainability, this chapter offers a thorough examination of the advantages, difficulties, and potential applications of digital and green technology in trash management. A cleaner and more effective waste management system is made possible by the combination of these advances, which also aligns with international sustainability goals like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN.

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Suman Gautam, Jai Narayan Mishra, Preeti Mishra, Preeti Verma & Sudhanshu Mishra (Eds.)

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INTRODUCTION

Effective waste management is essential for environmental sustainability, public health, and economic development. In recent years, the integration of digitalization and green technology has revolutionized traditional waste management practices. Waste management plays a crucial role in environmental sustainability, public health, and economic development. With increasing global waste production and its adverse effects on ecosystems and human health, there is a need for advanced and effective waste management strategies. In recent years, the integration of digital technologies and green innovations has significantly transformed traditional waste management practices, enhanced their effectiveness, and reduced ecological footprints. Some digitalization and green technologies in waste management are shown in Fig. (**1**).

Fig. (1). Role of digitalization and green technologies in waste management.

These innovative approaches not only optimize waste handling processes but also reduce ecological footprints, promote resource efficiency, and enhance overall sustainability [1].

DIGITALIZATION IN WASTE MANAGEMENT

Digitalization refers to the application of digital technologies, data analytics, and smart systems to improve operational efficiency. In the context of waste management, digitalization has significantly transformed how waste is collected, sorted, treated, and disposed of.

Key Applications Include

Smart Bins and IoT Sensors

Smart bins equipped with Internet of Things (IoT) sensors have revolutionized traditional waste management practices. These bins monitor fill levels in real-time and transmit data to centralized systems. The sensors typically use ultrasonic, infrared, or weight-based mechanisms to detect the amount of waste present. Municipalities and waste collection services can analyze this data to optimize collection schedules and routes, thereby reducing operational costs, lowering fuel consumption, and improving environmental performance. Furthermore, smart bins help prevent overflows and enhance hygiene in public spaces [2–4].

Waste Tracking Systems

Modern waste tracking systems utilize Global Positioning System (GPS) and Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) technologies to monitor waste movement from the point of origin to final disposal. RFID tags can be attached to waste containers or bags, and GPS-enabled vehicles track the route taken during waste collection and transportation. This system ensures transparency, helps authorities combat illegal dumping, and facilitates compliance with waste management regulations. These tracking platforms often feature real-time dashboards that monitor routes, waste types, and disposal statuses [5 - 7].

Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Predictive analytics and AI technologies play a pivotal role in smart waste management. By analyzing historical and real-time data, these tools can forecast waste generation patterns, enabling municipalities to make data-driven decisions regarding resource allocation, bin placement, and recycling capacity planning. AI-powered algorithms can also detect anomalies, predict maintenance needs, and enhance system efficiency. This approach ensures proactive rather than reactive waste management, significantly reducing operational bottlenecks [8 - 10].

Mobile Applications

Mobile apps have become essential tools in engaging communities in waste management. These applications allow residents to report waste-related issues, schedule waste collection, and receive notifications about recycling programs and educational campaigns. Some advanced apps even offer gamification features to encourage citizen participation and reward eco-friendly behavior. By enabling real-time communication between citizens and service providers, mobile apps significantly improve public responsiveness and civic engagement [11 - 13].

CHAPTER 11

Building Partnerships: Government, Industry, and NGOs in Waste Management

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Abstract: Emphasizing the cooperative roles of government agencies, the pharmaceutical industry, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), this chapter critically analyses the strategic relevance of tripartite partnerships in pharmaceutical waste management. The study emphasizes how combined approaches, combining strong legislative frameworks, creative waste treatment technology, and proactive public participation, may propel the change toward a circular economy model. While the pharmaceutical sector is acknowledged for its dedication to sustainable practices through careful waste separation, safe storage, and the adoption of eco-friendly technologies, government bodies are shown to establish and enforce comprehensive policies, allocate funding, and ensure rigorous oversight. NGOs are therefore very important in pushing for tighter rules, increasing public awareness, and enabling community-based take-back projects. The chapter critically addresses issues including different stakeholder priorities, budget limits, and communication difficulties, as well as explores successful partnership models and case studies showing observable environmental and financial advantages. The combined approach suggested here provides a reasonable route to improve public health, increase resource recovery, and lower the environmental impact of pharmaceutical waste.

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Suman Gautam, Jai Narayan Mishra, Preeti Mishra, Preeti Verma & Sudhanshu Mishra (Eds.)

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INTRODUCTION

The major environmental, health, and economic consequences of improper waste management have made the problem of pharmaceutical waste management more and more pressing. Improper disposal of pharmaceutical chemicals can pollute soil and water, endangering human health as well as ecological balance [1]. The need for strategic and sustainable methods for pharmaceutical waste management, including recycling where possible, becomes critical as awareness of these effects increases. Effectively tackling this difficult issue calls for the coordinated efforts and active participation of many different stakeholders, especially government agencies, the pharmaceutical sector, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The multifaceted nature of pharmaceutical waste, including complex regulatory environments, diverse industrial practices, and the need for widespread public involvement, calls for a coordinated effort across all three sectors to develop and implement solutions that are both efficient and sustainable [2]. A unified approach cannot be created or carried out in isolation; rather, it requires a shared awareness of responsibilities and a dedication to cooperating toward shared objectives. Distinct roles of each of these stakeholder groups will be discussed in this chapter, along with successful models of their cooperation, obstacles impeding efficient partnerships will be identified, and significant advantages resulting from a unified approach to pharmaceutical waste management will be underlined.

DISMANTLING THE FUNCTIONS: DUTIES OF GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS, AND NONPROFITS

Government: Regulatory Framework, Policy Implementation, and Monitoring

Local, regional, national, and even international government agencies play a fundamental role in creating and enforcing the comprehensive rules and standards that govern the entire lifecycle of pharmaceutical waste management [3]. This includes the vital work of classifying pharmaceutical waste into several categories, including hazardous versus non-hazardous waste and controlled substances, which determines the suitable handling, treatment, and disposal techniques. Agencies that specify acceptable treatment and disposal technologies include the Federal Environmental Protection Agency and state environmental and health departments. These might include chemical disinfection, autoclaving, incineration, and other techniques intended to reduce health hazards and environmental impacts [4]. The government's main duty, thus, is to build the basic legal and regulatory infrastructure, establishing the baseline for safe and environmentally sound pharmaceutical waste management techniques for all stakeholders. Without these clearly defined criteria, there would be inconsistency and a lack of responsibility in the management of pharmaceutical waste. Regulations provide the required framework for action, therefore guaranteeing that every person follows a shared set of rules meant to safeguard the environment and public health.

Apart from establishing the policies, government agencies have a major duty of monitoring various means of monitoring adherence to these set rules, which helps government agencies to fulfil their critical role [5].

Regular inspections and audits of treatment facilities, pharmaceutical manufacturing plants, healthcare institutions, disposal sites, and treatment facilities are vital to guarantee that rules are being followed in practice. Moreover, governments sometimes penalise facilities that do not follow waste management rules; the effects might be monetary fines or operating license suspensions [6]. To promote openness and support following high standards, facilities might also have to disclose their waste management policies.

Effective monitoring and enforcement are vital to guarantee that the rules are not only theoretical but also really implemented and followed by all relevant organisations, to preserve the environment and public health. Though well-designed, rules are not effective in the case of no supervision. Audits guarantee responsibility and stop malpractices that might have negative effects, including the release of untreated pharmaceutical waste into the environment or its diversion for illegal purposes.

Government agencies also play a key part in designating funds and resources to assist projects in the management of pharmaceutical waste. This can be in the shape of grants and subsidies given to waste management businesses and healthcare institutions to help invest in advanced technologies and the development of required infrastructure for the safe and efficient treatment and disposal of pharmaceutical waste [6]. For example, programs offered by the USDA for solid waste management can offer financial assistance for related initiatives [7]. A key catalyst is government funding, which helps especially with the rapid adoption of required but possibly costly technologies and infrastructure for smaller companies or in areas with limited financial resources.

Investing public money in appropriate waste management infrastructure and research shows a dedication to environmental protection and public health, and can drive sector innovation. This financial help can help overcome economic

CHAPTER 12

Microbes at Work: Transforming Pollutants through Bioremediation

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Abstract: Bioremediation utilizes microorganisms to clean the environment in an eco-friendly manner. This can take place *in situ* (at the contamination site) or *ex situ* (away from the area). Some in-situ methods include bioventing and biosparging. Bioventing adds oxygen to accelerate microbial breakdown of organic matter, especially petroleum hydrocarbons, while biosparging injects air and nutrients into groundwater to increase microbial activity. Both methods can be cost-effective, but are hindered by soil permeability and contaminant type. In bioaugmentation, specific strains of microbes are added to degrade more complex pollutants, such as hydrocarbons or heavy metals. Although bioaugmentation is effective, it faces challenges such as adaptation to the environment and competition. *Blandueriaum* volitilizans is a classical bioremediation species capable of degrading hydrocarbons and can alter the environment in which it is introduced due to pollution. Biopiles, composting, and landfarming are *ex-situ* techniques that treat contaminated soils and are kept in a controlled environment. These techniques perform well, but require a significant amount of time and money. This chapter covers the role of diverse microorganisms in bioremediation, including their degradation mechanisms, enzymatic pathways, and biotechnological enhancements like biostimulation, bioaugmentation, and genetic engineering, while also exploring microbial applications in waste treatment and future bioremediation technologies.

Keywords: Bioremediation, Microbial bioremediation, Pharmaceutical waste management, Phytoremediation.

INTRODUCTION

Pharmaceutical waste encompasses residues from pharmaceutical manufacturing and healthcare facilities, as well as expired, unused, or improperly disposed of pharmaceuticals. Because of their potential toxicity, bioaccumulation, and persistence, these pollutants have grown to be a serious environmental problem. Pharmaceutical pollutants frequently accumulate in soil and water bodies because

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Suman Gautam, Jai Narayan Mishra, Preeti Mishra, Preeti Verma & Sudhanshu Mishra (Eds.)

conventional waste treatment techniques, such as cremation and chemical degradation, fail to fully eliminate them. Consequently, the demand for environmentally friendly and sustainable waste management systems is rising [1].

Bioremediation is defined as the process in which the biological degradation of organic pollutants under controlled conditions to harmless levels, as defined by regulatory authorities, is done [2]. This process utilizes living organisms, predominantly microorganisms such as bacteria, fungi, and microalgae, to break down or detoxify hazardous substances, transforming them into less harmful forms. These microorganisms may be naturally present in contaminated areas or introduced from external sources. Through their metabolic processes, these organisms convert toxic compounds, thereby restoring the natural environment and preventing further contamination [3].

Pharmaceutical waste can undergo microbial bioremediation using a variety of techniques, such as ex situ (off-site) and in situ (on-site) approaches. To increase degradation efficiency, methods including bio-stimulation, which boosts the proliferation of natural microorganisms, and bioaugmentation, which introduces specific microbial strains, are employed. Furthermore, the use of plants and the bacteria that are linked with them, known as phytoremediation, has demonstrated promise in eliminating pharmaceutical pollutants from contaminated environments [4].

The delayed breakdown of complex pharmaceutical compounds and the fluctuation of microbial activity across different environmental settings are two obstacles that bioremediation must overcome, despite its benefits. To improve microbial capacities for the breakdown of pharmaceutical waste, developments in genetic engineering and biotechnology are being investigated. Bioremediation can significantly reduce pharmaceutical pollution with further study and development, leading to environmentally benign and sustainable waste management solutions [5].

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF PHARMACEUTICAL CONTAMINANTS

Pharmaceutical pollutants' persistence, bioaccumulation, and potential toxicity to ecosystems and human health have made them a serious environmental issue. Pharmaceutical companies, hospitals, farming methods, and inappropriate drug disposal are the sources of these pollutants. They contaminate water bodies, soil, and even drinking water sources when they enter the environment through wastewater discharge, landfill leachate, and agricultural runoff. The effect that pharmaceutical pollutants have on aquatic environments is one of the main issues. Antibiotics, analgesics, hormones, and psychiatric medications are among the active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) that have been found in groundwater, lakes, and rivers. These substances have the potential to disturb aquatic life by changing fish and other creatures' reproductive systems, growth patterns, and behaviour. Endocrine-disrupting medications, such as birth control pills and hormones, have been connected to the feminization of male fish, which causes population imbalances [6].

The impact of pharmaceutical contaminants on the emergence of microorganisms resistant to antibiotics is another important concern. Selective pressure from antibiotics released into the environment drives the evolution and dissemination of genes conferring resistance in microbial communities. Antibiotic resistance lowers the efficiency of therapies for bacterial illnesses, which presents a major threat to world health. Pharmaceutical residues from agricultural techniques and wastewater sludge build up in soil, influencing microbial diversity and plant growth, making soil contamination another environmental problem. Long half-lives of some medications cause them to stay in the environment for extended periods of time and bioaccumulate in food chains [7].

To mitigate the negative effects of pharmaceutical pollutants on the environment, bioremediation is a viable approach. Drugs can be broken down by microorganisms like fungi and bacteria into less harmful metabolites, which lessens their persistence and ecological damage. Modern bioremediation methods can help clean up polluted areas and halt the long-term harm that pharmaceutical contaminants cause to the environment [8].

NEED FOR SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT

Pharmaceutical waste is becoming a major environmental problem, and this calls for the creation of effective and sustainable waste management plans. Pharmaceutical pollutants are frequently not completely degraded by conventional methods such as cremation, chemical degradation, and landfill disposal, which results in their persistence in the environment. By releasing dangerous byproducts, these techniques can also be costly and lead to secondary pollution. Bioremediation has emerged as a practical and environmentally sustainable option to address these issues and effectively handle pharmaceutical waste.

Bioremediation uses microorganisms, such as bacteria, fungi, and algae, to break down pharmaceutical pollutants into less hazardous or non-toxic forms. In order to break down complicated pharmaceutical chemicals and make them ecologically safe, microbial degradation takes place through enzymatic pathways. A number of variables affect how well bioremediation works, such as the chemical makeup of the medicinal substances, the surrounding environment, and the metabolic capacity of the participating microbial populations. The breakdown of

SUBJECT INDEX

A

B

C

Suman Gautam, Jai Narayan Mishra, Preeti Mishra, Preeti Verma & Sudhanshu Mishra (Eds.)

D

E

F

G

H

I

L

M

N

O

P

R

S

T

U

V

W

X

Z

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