

FOCUS *on* HEALTH

Kids and meds

Manufacturers slow to solve label problems for kids' drugs

By Jessika Boedeker
For the Barrow County News

A new study indicated that makers of liquid medicines for children have not remedied labeling inconsistencies that make it hard for parents to tell whether they're giving a safe, effective dose of a non-prescription drug to a child.

Of 200 popular, over-the-counter (OTC) liquid medicines examined by researchers, 148 were packaged with measuring devices such as spoons, syringes or miniature cups. These are common treatments for cough and colds, pain, allergies, or gastrointestinal problems.

Of these 148 products, the units marked on the measuring device did not correspond to dosage amounts specified on package inserts for 146. Some cups or syringes had too few markings, some had too many, and others were marked with unfamiliar measurements such as drams or cubic centimeters that most people would have trouble translating to match the package insert.

"I think this study validates what a lot of people in the general public feel,"

said epidemiologist Dr. Darren DeWalt, a professor of epidemiology at the University of North Carolina. "It is often confusing to make sense of the instructions on these medications. Particularly in the middle of the night when your child is crying."

In 2009, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), issued voluntary guidelines for companies that manufacture, market, or distribute OTC liquid medications.

"Our study found that nearly all products, or at least the most commonly purchased, were inconsistent with the FDA voluntary guidelines," said Dr. Lee Sanders, a pediatrician and co-author of the study, which appeared in the October 2009 issue of *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

The authors recommend that the measurement units, abbreviations, and numeric formats should be standardized for all liquid OTC products — which would make life easier for consumers.

For now, parents should ask their doctor or pharmacist to draw a line on the measuring cup or syringe to mark, the correct dosage for their child, Dewalt rec-



ommends.

Barrow County pharmacists agree that liquid medicines for children are most effective when given at the correct dosage.

"I think children's cold medicine is effective, but in many cases they are used more often than necessary," said Rebecca Welch, a Rite Aid Pharmacist in Winder.

Local pharmacists differ

about what the gold standard for doling out OTC medicines should be. Most parents are familiar with the idea of a teaspoon, but may reach for any spoon that's handy instead of a properly calibrated measuring device.

"I think the syringe is the most precise unit of measurement," said Ashish Patel, a CVS Pharmacist in

Winder.

Dr. Sanders says that manufactures and regulatory agencies should do more research to discover how discrepancies between labels and measuring devices can best be resolved.

"Companies should be testing these measuring devices and labels with consumers to ensure they can be used accurately by

everyone," Dr. DeWalt agreed.

— Boedeker is a graduate student at the University of Georgia pursuing her masters in Health and Medical Journalism. As part of the curriculum she was assigned Barrow County to report on health related topics of interest to the community.