



# Dispensing without distractions

PERHAPS the number one enemy of the pharmacist is the distraction generated by the commercial activities of the pharmacy.

This is a conclusion of the Pharmacy Risk Management Committee which meets to review all claims effecting pharmacists and to develop guidance and solutions to reduce the incidence of claims and of which I am a member.

## Work distractions

There are very few professionals who provide their skills and knowledge in such an open, potentially noisy, and high traffic environment. All these elements can each contribute and lead to stress and fatigue, and reduce the ability to concentrate for long periods.

Yet so often we come across claims which might have been averted if appropriate systems, staffing and a well-designed dispensary had been in place. Too many pharmacy boards find when making a judgement of professional misconduct against pharmacists that workload or other work issues

on the day had distracted the pharmacist.

There are obvious limits on the capacity of any individual, irrespective of skill and experience, to work in an error-free manner over long stretches of time. A planned work day with some element of job rotation where possible, including sufficient breaks to minimise fatigue, is essential. The appropriate use of dispensary technicians can also help to alleviate some of the pressure on the pharmacist.

## Systems in and around the dispensary

It's important to organise the pharmacy's systems in a manner that maximises efficiency and capacity, promotes risk-minimising behaviours by all involved in the dispensing process, and helps to address those errors that can emerge from a range of human factors in a system of medicine dispensing.

Likewise, a well-designed dispensary that allows staff to work with minimal distractions is essential for both the wellbeing of staff and control the potential for errors. Of course, a fine balance must be struck

between ease of access for patient counselling and staff interactions.

A logical workflow within the dispensary is essential to reduce double handling or possible confusion, particularly when the script volume increases and the pressure is on. Where there is more than one dispensing station, each should, where possible, be self-contained to avoid risk from resources being shared, such as label and repeat printers.

The committee has made a number of suggestions which can be adopted in order to minimise the chance of human error caused by distraction (see Table One).

## Accurate data entry

Distractions can also affect the way in which we input information into the database-driven dispensing programs which we use and are essential due to the variety and volume of drugs we dispense. Like all technologies, they are as good as the way in which they are handled and the committee has duly made a number of suggestions which, if followed consistently, will also minimise the chance of human error impacting on data in the dispense system (see Table Two).

By identifying areas that, if left unchecked, leave you legally exposed, working proactively to minimise preventable errors and devoting an appropriate level of attention to minimise errors, your pharmacy will be better placed to deliver a professional service to the community rather than potentially harm its members.

## Avenues for assistance?

To help you and your staff to better assess your levels of risk, an anonymous online survey system called RiskMASTER is available via Guild Insurance. This quick and easy-to-use tool can be accessed via the guild group's website at [www.guildgroup.com.au](http://www.guildgroup.com.au).

There's also GuildWatch, a Risk Management Guide for Pharmacy, which offers guidance on a range of risk minimisation issues. GuildWatch is also available online or by contacting your local Guild Insurance office on 1800 810 213.

If your pharmacy does have any concern about an incident of patient harm or potential harm, simply contact your state PDL branch for advice and assistance. ■

TABLE ONE: Minimising errors due to distraction

- redirect all incoming phone calls to the service counter;
- physically separate dispensing and commercial functions;
- properly design work stations that have sufficient room, dedicated label printers, and adjustable heights for benches and fittings;
- sound ergonomics including sound baffling and noise control, and ergonomic workflow management (for example, avoiding double-handling, stretching and bending)
- high quality illumination—dedicated light sources where pharmaceuticals are stored, and are above work and preparation areas
- staff training for assistants and technicians to ensure they understand how to interact with the pharmacist under a variety of circumstances.

TABLE TWO: Minimising data input errors

- check any data entered as an error can be multiplied;
- control access and administrator rights;
- avoid double entry of data;
- enter consistent and 'decipherable' abbreviations and notations; and
- update data on a regular cycle.