Prescription Filling Procedures

THE PRESCRIPTION FILLING PROCESS begins with the receipt and review of the prescription, and ends with the dispensing of the medication to the patient. Although a patient may bring in multiple prescriptions, each prescription follows the same critical path. Although speed is important, 100% accuracy is critical. To minimize the possibility of error, the prescription and product selection are checked several times for accuracy during the filling process by both the pharmacist and the pharmacy technician.

Objective:

Process prescriptions using proper filling procedure.

Key Terms:

adverse drug events (ADE)
auxiliary label
controlled substances
fax
generic drug
nasal
national drug code (NDC) number
ophthalmic
otic
over the counter (OTC)
prescription

Processing Prescriptions Using Proper Filling Technique

PROCESSING PRESCRIPTIONS

A **prescription** is an order for medication that is issued by a physician or other properly licensed health care provider. A prescription designates a specific medication and dosage to be

administered to a particular patient at a specific time. Dispensing includes all the steps necessary to translate a medication order, or prescription, into an individualized medication supply that is safe and appropriate for the patient.

Methods of Receipt

There are a number of ways that an individual can present their prescription to a pharmacy to be filled.

Walk In

A patient may present a paper prescription written by a health care provider. Prescriptions, when handwritten, are notorious for being illegible. Avoidable errors, associated with handwritten prescriptions, include incorrect drug, dosage or dosage form, duplication of therapy, and misinterpretation of the order. These errors, if identified before the prescription is processed, often require additional communication between the pharmacist and the provider, thus delaying patient care. A disadvantage of paper prescription is that the prescription may be forgotten and never filled, or the prescription may be lost. The lost prescription must be rewritten or called into the pharmacy.

Call In

A health care provider may designate an employee to telephone a prescription into the pharmacy. The pharmacist must always create a written form of a telephonic order.

Fax

A health care provider may send the pharmacy a fax of a prescription. A **fax** is an image of a document made by electronic scanning and transmitted as data by telecommunication links. In some states, it is legal for a patient to fax a prescription to the pharmacy. However, the patient must provide the pharmacy with the original prescription before receiving the medication.

E-prescribing

A health care provider can write and then send a prescription to a participating pharmacy electronically. E-prescribing reduces or eliminates errors associated with illegible handwriting. Both the physician and pharmacist have access to a patient's prescription history to reduce the chance of the wrong drug being dispensed. There is instant notification of allergies, drug interactions, and duplicate therapies. E-prescribing enables

FIGURE 1. The pharmacy technician receives prescription requests, enters prescriptions into the pharmacy information system, maintains patient profiles, and answers phone calls.

better monitoring of prescriptions for controlled substances. A **controlled substance** is a drug whose manufacture, possession, or use is regulated by the government. E-prescribing streamlines prescription processing. The patient's wait time is reduced since the patient does not need to be present before a prescription is filled. The pharmacy technician does not need to manually enter the prescription into the computer.

Patient Profile

The pharmacy technician must create a patient profile if one does not already exist. The patient profile provides the patient's health history. It is completed the first time a prescription is filled in a pharmacy and is updated with subsequent new prescriptions and refills. Information in a patient profile may include:

- Name, address, telephone number, date of birth, gender, race
- Medical history that includes any surgeries
- Medication history that includes current prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements. **Over-the-Counter (OTC)** is the descriptive term for medicines that are sold directly to a consumer without a prescription from a healthcare provider.
- Drug and food allergies
- Any previous adverse drug events (An **adverse drug event (ADE)** is an injury resulting from medical intervention related to a drug, including medication errors, adverse drug reactions, allergic reactions, and overdoses.)
- Insurance information

Prescription Information

The pharmacy technician must interpret the prescription and enter the information into the computer system. When in doubt about the interpretation of a prescription, the pharmacy technician should ask the pharmacist for clarification. A pharmacy technician may enter the following information:

- The name, strength, dosage form, and quantity of the medication to be dispensed
- The route of administration
- The frequency of administration
- The availability of a generic version of the prescribed medication (A **generic drug** is a copy of a brand name drug with exactly the

FIGURE 2. One of the responsibilities of the pharmacy technician is to check to make sure that each prescription received in the pharmacy is complete and that the information about the medication order is documented accurately.

same dosage, intended use, side effects, route of administration, risks, safety, and strength as the original drug.)

- The number of refills permitted by the prescriber

PROPER FILLING PROCEDURE

After reading and checking the prescription order, the pharmacy technician should follow the pharmacy's exact procedure for dispensing medications. In order to efficiently and accurately select medications from the pharmacy stock to fill the prescription received, the technician must be familiar with the precise location of the drug inventory. The pharmacy technician fills a medication order based on a printed medication container label, after computer entry from the original prescription has been approved.

Verify

The pharmacy technician should verify all prescription information has been entered into the computer system properly. Once all of the required information has been entered into the computer system, the computer generates a label.

Pull the Drug

The pharmacy technician should take the printed prescription label with them when pulling medication from the shelf.

Compare

The pharmacy technician should compare the national drug code (NDC) number on the prescription label with the NDC number on the manufacturer's drug label, to ensure that the correct medication is pulled from the inventory. The **national drug code (NDC)** is a unique 10 digit number that is used to identify drug products.

FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Prescription Speed-ups Leading to Errors

Medication errors most likely cannot be completely eliminated, but using best practices can greatly reduce them. Medication errors are happening as pharmacy staff faces increasing pressure to fill more prescriptions. Many pharmacies guarantee to fill prescriptions within a specified time frame. Read the article "Prescription speed-ups leading to errors" at the web site http://www.consumermedsafety.org/medication-safety-articles/item/596-presription-speed-ups-leading-to-errors. Reflect on the comments made by the pharmacists at the end of the article. Do you agree or disagree with pharmacies offering time guarantees for prescriptions? Do you believe that pharmacists should be punished for putting safety before speed?

Count

To count solid dosage forms, a special counting tray is used that has a trough on one side to hold counted tablets and a spout on the opposite side to pour unused medication back into the stock bottle. Tablets and capsules should be counted using a clean spatula and picked up with forceps if dropped on the counter. The medication should be counted in multiples of five.

Contain

The pharmacy technician should select an appropriately sized container to hold the final amount of medication and pour the medication into the container. The technician may select a container according to size, color, and composition based on the type and quantity of medication being dispensed. A variety of containers are available.

- Round vials are used primarily for tablets, capsules, and caplets.
- Bottles are used for dispensing liquids.
- Dropper bottles are used for otic, ophthalmic, nasal, or oral medications. **Otic** is a term used to describe something that relates to, or is located in the region of the ear. **Ophthalmic** is a term used to describe something related to the eye. **Nasal** is a term used to describe something related to the nose.
- Jars are used for ointments, creams, and gels.

Affix

The pharmacy technician affixes the computer-generated prescription label onto the selected container. The technician must also affix any auxiliary label. An **auxiliary label** is a label added to the medication container that provides supplementary information regarding safe administration, use, and storage of the medication.

Check

The pharmacist is responsible for checking the final prescription before it is dispensed to the patient to eliminate the possibility of a medication error.

Bag

The pharmacist bags the approved prescription for patient sale and attaches the medication information sheet.

Bin

The pharmacy technician places the bagged medication in the appropriate storage bin awaiting patient pick up.

FIGURE 3. The counting tray is the most popular method for counting pills in the pharmacy. It is easy to understand and operate, but requires frequent cleaning to avoid cross contamination of pills.

Summary:

Pharmacy technicians play a key role in the dispensing of medications. The pharmacy technician is often responsible for entering the prescription order and creating or updating the computerized patient profile. The technician assists in the filling of prescriptions, which commonly involves retrieving stock bottles of drugs, counting the prescribed quantity of medications, filling the appropriate containers, and affixing medication container labels.

Checking Your Knowledge:

1. Describe four ways in which a prescription can be presented to the pharmacy.
2. Describe the information that should be included in a patient profile.
3. Explain how a national drug code number is used to verify the correct medication.
4. Describe the procedure for counting pills and selecting appropriate containers.
5. Explain the final safety check before a medication is dispensed to the patient.

Expanding Your Knowledge:

Ask your instructor if you can contact your local pharmacy and interview the pharmacist. Ask them to describe their prescription filling process. Ask if the pharmacy offers time guarantees and if the pharmacist believes that these guarantees lead to more dispensing errors. Report your findings to the entire class.

Web Links:

Breakdowns During the Dispensing Process
https://www.pharmacytimes.com/publications/issue/2012/june2012/breakdowns-during-the-dispensing-process

10 Strategies for Minimizing Dispensing Errors
https://www.pharmacytimes.com/publications/issue/2010/january2010/p2pdispensingerrors-0110

The Medication Dispensing Process for Pharmacists
https://study.com/academy/lesson/the-medication-dispensing-process-for-pharmacists.html