

Optimizing Workflow in Community Pharmacy: Practical Strategies for Efficiency and Patient Safety

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Presenter/Speaker Disclosure

Presenter's Name: Yan Chiu

- I have no current or past relationships with commercial entities

Speaking Fees for current program:

- I have received a speaker's fee from **Pharmacy Technician Society of Alberta (PTSA)** for this learning activity

Learning Objectives

- 01 Identify common workflow inefficiencies in community pharmacy practice
- 02 Apply practical strategies to improve workflow and task delegation
- 03 Evaluate approaches to reduce dispensing errors and improve patient safety
- 04 Implement workflow adjustments to enhance team efficiency in high-volume settings

Busy pharmacies = errors + burnout

- High prescription volume increases workload and time pressure
- Frequent interruptions contribute to dispensing errors
- Inefficient workflow leads to staff fatigue and burnout

Techs are the backbone of workflow

- Technicians manage key steps in prescription processing
- Workflow efficiency depends heavily on technician roles
- Strong technician coordination improves safety and speed

Small changes = huge impact

- Small workflow adjustments can reduce delays
- Clear role assignment improves efficiency
- Simple system changes can enhance patient safety

What is Workflow in Community Pharmacy?

Drop-off → Data Entry → Fill → Check → Pickup

- The flow of prescriptions from drop-off to pickup
- Involves people, processes, and systems
- Includes all steps: data entry, filling, verification, and dispensing
- Efficiency depends on coordination between team members

Common Workflow Challenges in Community Pharmacy

- Frequent interruptions (phones, patients, staff questions)
- Unclear roles and task overlap
- Delays in data entry or prescription processing
- Poor communication between team members
- High workload during peak hours



What do you guys think is the biggest challenge in your pharmacy?

Challenges in High-Volume Pharmacy Settings

High Workload & Time Pressure

- Large prescription volumes daily
- Limited time per task
- Pressure to work quickly

Frequent Interruptions

- Phone calls and patient inquiries
- Questions from team members
- Constant task switching

Staffing & Workflow Gaps

- Not enough staff during peak times
- Unclear role distribution
- Tasks overlapping or missed

Maintaining Accuracy

- Increased risk of dispensing errors
- Rushing leads to mistakes
- Balancing speed with patient safety

Analyzing Workflow in the Pharmacy

What's Working Well

- Efficient workflow steps already in place
- Strong team communication
- Clear role assignment

Current Challenges

- Frequent interruptions
- Delays in certain steps
(e.g. data entry, insurance)
- Unclear roles or task overlap



Areas for Improvement

- Better task delegation
- Improved communication systems
- Adjusting staffing during peak hours

Potential Impact if Unaddressed

- Increased dispensing errors
- Staff burnout
- Longer wait times and patient dissatisfaction

Key Strategy #1: WHO Does What – Clear Role Assignment

Why It Matters

- Reduces confusion and duplication
- Improves workflow efficiency
- Helps tasks move smoothly

Common Issue

- Everyone doing everything
- Tasks getting missed or repeated
- No clear ownership

Practical Approach

- Assign roles at start of shift
- Examples:
 - Data entry
 - Filling
 - Pick-up

Impact

- Faster processing
- Fewer errors
- Less stress for staff

Key Strategy #2: HOW Work Moves – Structured Workflow Design

Why It Matters

- Creates a consistent process
- Reduces confusion between steps
- Keeps workflow organized

Common Issue

- No clear or consistent flow
- Prescriptions moving back and forth
- Steps skipped or done out of order

Practical Approach

- Follow a clear sequence:

Drop-off → Data Entry → Fill → Check → Pick-up

- Keep workflow moving in one direction
- Avoid unnecessary backtracking

Impact

- Smoother workflow
- Fewer delays
- Improved accuracy and efficiency

Key Strategy #3: Managing Interruptions

Why It Matters

- Interruptions break focus
- Increase risk of errors
- Slow down workflow

Common Issue

- Phones constantly ringing
- Patients asking questions mid-task
- Staff interrupting each other

Practical Approach

- Assign one person to handle interruptions
- Batch non-urgent tasks when possible
- Pause safely and document progress before switching tasks

Impact

- Improved focus and accuracy
- Fewer mistakes
- More efficient workflow

Key Strategy #4: Effective Communication

Why It Matters

- Ensures smooth handoffs between tasks
- Reduces confusion and delays
- Supports team efficiency

Common Issue

- Information not clearly communicated
- Tasks assumed but not confirmed
- Misunderstandings between staff

Practical Approach

- Use clear and direct communication
- Confirm important information
- Use simple systems (notes, labels, verbal handoffs)

Impact

- Fewer errors
- Better coordination
- Improved workflow efficiency

Key Strategy #5: Managing Peak Times

Why It Matters

- Workload increases during peak hours
- Higher risk of delays and errors
- More pressure on staff

Common Issue

- Same workflow used all day
- No adjustment for busy periods
- Staff overwhelmed during peak times

Practical Approach

- Adjust roles during peak hours
- Work to each staff member's strengths
- Prioritize urgent prescriptions
- Delay non-urgent tasks when needed

Impact

- Better workflow control during busy times
- Reduced stress for staff
- Improved patient experience

Key Strategy #6: Integrating Safety into Workflow

Why It Matters

- Workflow directly impacts patient safety
- Errors are more likely during busy periods
- Distractions increase risk

Common Issue

- Rushing through tasks
- Skipping safety checks
- Losing focus during interruptions

Practical Approach

- Build safety checks into workflow
- Pause and verify during critical steps
- Minimize distractions during high-risk tasks

Impact

- Reduced dispensing errors
- Improved patient safety
- Increased confidence in workflow

Before (Challenges)

- Unclear role assignment
- Frequent interruptions
- Tasks overlapping or delayed
- Inefficient workflow flow



After (Improvements)

- Clear roles assigned per shift
- Better management of interruptions
- Structured workflow process
- Improved communication



Key Takeaways

- 01 Clear roles improve efficiency
- 02 Structured workflow reduces delays
- 03 Managing interruptions improves focus and safety
- 04 Effective communication supports team coordination
- 05 Small changes can have a big impact

Final Thoughts

Workflow is not about perfection — it's about making your day safer and more manageable.

THANK YOU

Any questions?