



Policy

Dispensary Assistants

PREAMBLE

Dispensary assistants have been involved in assisting the pharmacists in dispensing medicines in a formal sense for a number of years. In 1996 the Pharmacists Board, after consultation with representatives of the Pharmaceutical Society, the Pharmacy Guild, the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia and the School of Pharmacy, University of Queensland developed a document titled *Guidelines for Pharmacist for the use of Dispensary Assistants*. The document provided guidelines for the use of dispensary assistants in Queensland pharmacy practice and outlined the duties, limitation of duties and training for dispensary assistants.

The Board has reviewed the Guidelines in the context of current pharmacy practice and has incorporated amendments to the original document. The Board has adopted the reviewed Guidelines as representing the criteria under which pharmacists in Queensland may use dispensing assistants in the practice of pharmacy.

GUIDELINES FOR PHARMACISTS REGARDING THE USE OF DISPENSARY ASSISTANTS

INTRODUCTION

Pharmacists remain, at all times, responsible for the activities of dispensary assistants. The activities of dispensary assistants should never involve the exercise of professional pharmaceutical judgement. Pharmacists may be said to be exercising professional judgement if, when considering a situation, they call upon any knowledge acquired while gaining their qualification or subsequent to achieving it, take into account any other relevant matters, and integrate all of that information into a judgement which in the pharmacist's opinion is in the best interest and well-being of the patient.

NOTE: *Throughout this document the general term "Dispensary Assistant" has been used. However, when this document is applied to Community Pharmacy, the term "Pharmacy Assistant in the Dispensary" may be more appropriate. Similarly, in Hospital Pharmacy practice, the term "Pharmacy Technician" may be more applicable to assistants with a particular level of training.*

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PHARMACIST

The pharmacist shall ensure:

- that dispensary assistants are aware of, and adhere to, the requirement that confidentiality and privacy legislation issues in regard to patient information are observed;
- that dispensary assistants are personally supervised by a pharmacist;
- that the number of dispensary assistants that a pharmacist can adequately supervise does not normally exceed two per pharmacist. (However the Board recognizes that future work re-design initiatives may result in models where it is considered reasonable for a pharmacist to supervise a number of dispensary assistants. In such cases the Board could consider such arrangements on a case by case basis. It is also recognised in some community pharmacies, depending on workload, that an individual may be a "dispensary assistant" for some time and a "pharmacy

(shop) assistant” at other times. Alternatively, several members of staff may be trained “dispensary assistants” and work in that capacity on a roster basis.);

- that the activities of dispensary assistants do not require the exercise of professional pharmaceutical judgement by the assistant;
- that a position description and duty statement is maintained for dispensary assistants and that it be available for inspection;
- that dispensary assistants comply with relevant policies, procedures and legal obligations.

DUTIES OF DISPENSARY ASSISTANTS

The range of tasks that dispensary assistants may carry out under the supervision of a pharmacist include:

- receipting, unpacking and checking stock including stocktaking activities;
- checking expiry dates and rotating stock;
- monitoring imprest stock in nursing homes and hospitals;
- packing pharmaceuticals for dispatch;
- completing records of delivery of non-recordable drugs;
- maintaining records of invoices and other documents;
- indexing, retrieving and filing patient medication records;
- performing clerical functions associated with the prescription dispensing, including the entering of prescription records provided that a pharmacist personally checks each patient’s medication history before the dispensed medicine is supplied;
- selecting items for dispensing when specifically directed by the pharmacist;
- selecting cautionary advisory labels as directed by the pharmacist;
- repackaging pharmaceuticals;
- assisting in the preparation of sterile and non-sterile products;
- providing general administrative support including collating reports.

LIMITATIONS OF DUTIES OF DISPENSARY ASSISTANTS

A pharmacist shall not allow dispensary assistants to undertake the following tasks associated with prescription medicines:

- patient counselling;
- issuing dispensed medicine or pharmacist only medicine unless checked, authorised and approved by a pharmacist;
- receiving prescriptions by telephone;
- authenticating prescriptions;
- interpreting prescriptions;
- making decisions regarding generic substitution on prescriptions;
- making other clinical judgements.

TRAINING OF DISPENSARY ASSISTANTS

Pharmacists who use dispensary assistants should ensure that those dispensary assistants successfully undertake training programs acceptable to the Pharmacists Board.

The Board currently recognises courses offered by the Pharmacy Guild, the Pharmaceutical Society, the Society of Hospital Pharmacists and Queensland Health.

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