

Improving Safety and Quality by Integrating Paper-based and Electronic Systems to Better Manage Standard Operating Procedures in Community Pharmacy

Rebecca Cheng, BPharm, RegPharmNZ, MRPharmS and Charles Mabbett

*Pharmacy Guild of New Zealand
124 Dixon Street, Wellington 6011, New Zealand
r.cheng@pgnz.org.nz, c.mabbett@pgnz.org.nz*

Abstract

Medicines Control (a division of the Ministry of Health) requires all pharmacies to have a complete set of standard operating procedures (SOPs) to fulfil their Quality Audit requirements. The SOPs can range from dispensing a medicine, through to cleaning the fridge. There are currently over 100 SOPs that pharmacies must have in order to comply with the Medicines Control audit requirements. The Pharmacy Guild of New Zealand (Inc) (the Guild) has developed an electronic programme together with template SOPs to help pharmacies comply with the Quality Audit requirements. The new service – GuildLink® - is available to pharmacies on a subscription basis and is designed to manage and improve quality within community pharmacy practice.

1. Introduction

All community pharmacies must fulfil the requirements of the Pharmacy Quality Audit, conducted by Medicines Control. The purpose of this audit is to monitor the performance of pharmacy service providers. It provides quality assurance to the District Health Boards that the services conducted from a pharmacy meet the quality requirements. It also provides an opportunity for the pharmacy proprietor to identify areas for further development.

Pharmacy Quality Audits form a critical part of the delivery and quality of community pharmacy services. Members have identified Pharmacy Quality Audits as an area where they need assistance, particularly with regards to SOPs, documenting dispensing errors and near misses, recording staff training and staff job descriptions.

2. Clinical problem/requirement

All pharmacies are audited at least once within a five year cycle. Audits include an assessment of:

- the organisation
- management of controlled drugs
- dispensing, compounding, repacking and batch preparation
- management of pharmaceuticals
- risk management
- pharmacy facilities
- pharmacy services
- compliance packaging, dose packaging & unit dose packaging
- opioid substitution treatment
- clozapine dispensing
- automated packing and dispensing
- aseptic dispensing of sterile products

Many of the SOPs that make up the basis of Pharmacy Quality Audits are detailed procedures that require regular maintenance. The updating and regular compliance deadlines place considerable demands on the resources of pharmacists and their staff. There are over 100 pages of SOPs. The failure to record compliance with SOP requirements means pharmacists have to spend considerable resources updating their records and even adjusting their processes in order to pass an audit.

For example, pharmacists need to document a quality improvement program and time frames for their pharmacy. Pharmacies have a contractual obligation with their DHB for quality improvement. They need to use a Ministry of Health Quality Improvement Plan template to suit the individual needs of the pharmacy.

Procedures should be identified as required by each pharmacy and the number of quality improvement projects may vary according to what is currently happening in an individual pharmacy. The Quality Improvement Plan should be dated and assigned a review date at least annually. A pharmacist also needs to ensure that the plan is being monitored to ensure it is going according to schedule.

Another example is the management of controlled drugs. Pharmacists are required to perform a half yearly controlled drugs stocktake on 30 June and 31 December. They are required to document the theoretical stock account (quantity stock account). They are also required to measure or count all stock quantities, document the total on each page of the controlled drug register and provide explanations of variations in the controlled drugs register, within 14 days of the these dates.

They must also retain original copies of controlled drug prescriptions for at least four years to comply with the Health (Retention of Health Information) Regulations. These records need to be stored for a further six years, either as the original prescription or the information retained in an accessible electronic format.

They are also required to maintain an approved form of controlled drugs register. Each strength and form of each controlled drug entity must have a separately headed page in the register. The destruction of controlled drugs also needs to be accurately recorded, along with all purchases and dispensing.

Pharmacists are also required to keep current copies of patient charts, with any changes documented, signed and dated by the prescriber who has made additions, deletions or alterations.

To our knowledge, there is no existing software programme or system that enables New Zealand community pharmacists to track and record their SOPs. This innovation has been developed because of an evident gap in the software programmes that are available to community pharmacists. GuildLink® aims to target an evident need by community pharmacists to keep on top of their SOPs.

3. About GuildLink®

For the reasons listed above, the Guild has developed a software programme that is designed to help community pharmacists manage their work in respect of matters covered by the SOPs. This new software is a central feature of GuildLink® and it is intended to help pharmacists manage and keep up-to-date with their audit requirements. In addition to the electronic programme, the Guild is supplying template SOPs.

The software:

- provides pharmacists with a complete set of SOP templates with regular automatic updates
- manages a pharmacy's policies
- records dispensing errors
- is easily implemented on existing pharmacy computer systems
- manages staff training
- incorporates the pharmacist's regulatory requirements into their everyday practice
- allows regular reminders to be set for updating policies and SOPs

The software also helps:

- spread a pharmacy's regulatory workload throughout the year
- assigns SOPs to staff members for updating
- sets regular tasks for the staff, such as refrigerator temperature checks and controlled drugs reconciliation

- generate customised reports on SOPs, dispensing errors and pharmacy policies
- generate customised staff reports
- retrieve SOPs, policies and job descriptions easily
- download new and updated SOPs with the click of a button
- demonstrate a pharmacy is continually improving its pharmacy practice and the quality of service to patients

4. Comparisons with other approaches

There is no equivalent system being used in community pharmacy. GuildLink® has been developed because feedback received from pharmacists has prompted the Guild to identify this as an opportunity to provide additional management support for community pharmacies.

5. Evaluation

The GuildLink® system is in the final stages of development. Initial trials with pharmacists and several Medicines Control auditors indicate the software and SOP management system are positive improvements on existing systems. The key advantage of GuildLink® is to demonstrate that pharmacies are continually improving their practice. It ensures that pharmacists regularly implement and maintain their SOPs, as opposed to displaying them purely to meet their audit obligations.

The system became available to community pharmacies in September 2011. As the programme is rolled out to members, GuildLink® will be closely monitored for any operational problems and issues. Feedback from members and auditors will be evaluated after implementation to ensure the promise of highest quality is met.