Duties of the Pharmacy Technician

Job Description

The role of the pharmacy technician is essential to the pharmacy’s efficiency. The technician’s work will be challenging and include a variety of duties. There is a great deal of responsibility as well. It is extremely important for pharmacy technicians to attend to details and have solid mathematical computational skills. Knowledge of the generic and brand names of frequently prescribed medications will be of particular use when assisting the pharmacist. Although pharmacy technicians perform essential tasks that do not require the pharmacist’s skill or expertise, they will always work under the supervision of a pharmacist. Below, we will examine the typical responsibilities of pharmacy technicians in the community, hospital, and managed care settings.

Scope of Practice is a term that defines the procedures, actions, and processes that are permitted for a licensed individual. It is important for pharmacy technicians to have a clear sense of their role in relation to the pharmacist’s role.

Community Setting

Community pharmacies employ more pharmacy technicians than any other setting. The purpose of the pharmacy technician is to assist the pharmacist with daily activities within the pharmacy. Most community pharmacies are located in grocery and retail stores. Typical responsibilities of the pharmacy technician in the community setting include:

- Assisting patients who are dropping off or picking up prescriptions
- Entering data and medication orders into the pharmacy computer program
- Creating and/or updating patient profiles and health insurance information
- Communicating with insurance carriers regarding claims and payment verification
- Communicating with prescribers and their agents to obtain refill authorization
- Ordering medication; verifying associated paperwork and stocking orders
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- Assisting the pharmacist with filling and labeling prescriptions
- Preparing for the pharmacy inventory
- Performing housekeeping duties within the pharmacy department
- Answering the phone and handling questions that do not require pharmacist expertise or judgment
- Compounding oral solutions, ointments, and creams
- Repackaging bulk medication

Pharmacy Technicians Support the Pharmacist

Pharmacy technicians are not authorized to discuss medications, including warnings and interactions, with patients. In the event that a patient asks you about a medication, you must notify the pharmacist so that they can respond to the patient’s inquiry.

Hospital Setting

Under the direction of a pharmacist, the pharmacy technician performs pharmacy-related functions in compliance with department policies and procedures. Duties may include those required in the community setting; additional pharmacy technician responsibilities in the hospital setting may also include:

- Rotating through all work areas of the pharmacy
- Transporting medications, drug delivery devices and other pharmacy equipment from the pharmacy to nursing units and clinics
- Picking up and returning copies of physician orders, automated administration records, and unused medications from the nursing unit to the pharmacy
- Screening telephone calls
- Preparing inventories, ordering drugs and supplies from the storeroom, receiving drugs, and stocking shelves
- Performing monthly nursing unit inspections, maintaining workload records, and collecting quality-assurance data
- Preparing medications and supplies for dispensing, including:
  - Repackaging bulk medications
  - Compounding ointments and creams, oral solutions, and other medications
  - Preparing chemotherapeutic agents
  - Compounding total parenteral nutrition solutions
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- Compounding large-volume intravenous mixtures
- Packaging and preparing drugs being used in clinical investigations
- Preparing prescriptions for outpatients

Managed Care Setting

Patients who carry health insurance, also referred to as third-party programs, are enrolled in some kind of managed care plan. A managed care plan is an organized way of providing and paying for medical services. Almost all plans today include protocols for reducing unnecessary use of health care while managing costs. Examples of managed care plans include: Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs), Preferred Provider Organizations (PPOs), Medicaid, and Medicare. Typical responsibilities of the pharmacy technician in a managed care setting are performed under the supervision of a pharmacist and include:

- Handling telephone calls regarding pharmacy benefits from members, pharmacy providers, and physicians
- Processing and verifying claims with knowledge of plan parameters
- Developing and maintaining an electronic service log of telephone calls, including follow-up history
- Creating reports that forecast possible trends in pharmacy service
- Providing telephone and administrative support for the managed care department

Questions

1. Why is it important for pharmacy technicians to understand their scope of practice?
2. What are the main duties of the pharmacy technician?