

Managing Medications

To Have or Not to Have an On-site Pharmacy

Having medications available through an On-Site Pharmacy or other Point of Care System within the clinic may influence medication compliance. It is a widely documented fact that many patients leave the physician's office and never fill their prescription. With a well-stocked pharmacy, providers will be certain that the patient has the necessary medication and education and, in many cases, may easily take their first dose right in their health clinic.

There is a variety of medication access programs used successfully within the nonprofit community to assist low-income and uninsured individuals to obtain critically needed medications.

Models include:

- Medication Access Programs
 - within a clinic setting or as a stand-alone organization, programs that assist people to apply for medications from individual Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs) sponsored by pharmaceutical companies
- Central Fill Pharmacies
 - similar to a mail order pharmacy, pharmacies that accept prescriptions by fax or e-script from participating facilities or physicians with whom they have an agreement. Pharmacies fill the prescription and send it back to the individual patient, facility, or physician for distribution to the named patient
- Charitable Pharmacies
 - nonprofit, direct service pharmacies where people without prescription insurance who meet the income criteria may take their prescription from their clinic or physician to be filled at no cost
- Statewide Pharmacy Access Programs
 - participating local pharmacies agree to fill prescriptions from eligible patients referred by a statewide referral network of medical

practitioners who voluntarily agree to accept and to treat eligible patients at no charge

- Physician Dispensing
 - using the dispensing ability of the licensed physician staffing the clinic
- On-Site Pharmacies
 - state-licensed pharmacies physically located in clinics that dispense medication to enrolled clinic patients

Central Fill Pharmacies, Charitable Pharmacies, On-Site Pharmacies, and participating pharmacies in Statewide Pharmacy Access Programs generally obtain prescription medications through Institutional Patient Assistance Programs (IPAPs) sponsored by pharmaceutical companies. In addition, Central Fill Pharmacies, Charitable Pharmacies, and On-Site Pharmacies may expand their available inventory through purchased stock, donation aggregators like AmeriCares, physician sample donations, and by helping people to apply for medications from individual Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs) sponsored by pharmaceutical companies. The ease of access to medications for the patient varies by model. With individual PAPs, the patient, if determined to be eligible, may wait up to six weeks to receive their prescribed medication. With On-Site Pharmacies and Physician Dispensing models, if the medication is available in stock, the patient's prescription may be filled immediately following their medical appointment.

When making the decision whether or not to have an On-Site Pharmacy for your clinic patients, there are many points to consider:

- The current system for obtaining medications throughout the present safety-net structure.
 - What medication assistance programs are operating in your community currently?
 - Are large local retailers offering \$4 generic prescriptions?
 - What partnerships or collaborative efforts may be formed and resources shared?
 - Each safety-net organization within the community is struggling to provide critical healthcare and medication to meet an ever-increasing patient demand.

- How might you work together for mutual benefit to achieve comprehensive patient care?
- The type of clinic: Acute Care, Chronic Care, Specialty, Full-Service, etc.
 - Will your clinic serve patients who present with acute illnesses and chronic conditions, or only those who have been diagnosed with chronic conditions?
 - Will your clinic be serving a specific population, such as the homeless, or be disease specific?
 - Your target population may narrow down many of your patients' medication requirements and point to the type of medication access program that best meets those needs.
- The potential number of patients to be served through your clinic program.

The medication access program your clinic chooses will partially be influenced by the number of patients you anticipate providing services for. A smaller, specialized clinic may be best served by a basic program within the clinic setting that assists people to apply for medications from individual Patient Assistance Programs sponsored by pharmaceutical companies. That approach alone would be overwhelmingly time-consuming and ineffective for a clinic that anticipates providing both acute and chronic care services to a large number of patients. For these clinics, an On-Site Pharmacy may provide easier access to prescription medicines and may increase capacity.

- Your clinic's primary focus and goals
 - What is the primary focus in your health clinic?

Is it providing minor emergency care and essential primary healthcare services on a short-term basis or is the focus on being the patient's medical home by providing on-going treatment and prevention of disease or illness and health education?

- Is your scope of service fixed or is the organization's intent to increase services and programs as resources allow?
- If your plan is to include on-site medication access, it may be prudent to establish an On-Site Pharmacy in your start-up and have it function on a limited basis initially. By doing so, the structure and operating model will be in place as your medication access programs expand.
- Clinic Mission, Values, Policy/Procedures

- What is the clinic's philosophy regarding how medications will be paid for?
- Will patients be required to provide all or part of the cost?
- Will payment be made to the clinic or to a local pharmacy?
- How will medication be provided to those patients who have no money to put toward the cost of medications?
- Facility operation requirements

An On-Site Pharmacy requires sufficient physical space, equipment, security, and storage area. There are specific rules and regulations dictating how prescription medications are stored, handled, and dispensed. These rules and regulations are monitored and enforced by the state's Board of Pharmacy. Physical standards that may be regulated are:

- 1) Minimum square footage of the pharmacy or prescription department
- 2) Security and access
- 3) Schedules or types of drugs to be maintained by the pharmacy
- 4) A sink and refrigerator located within the secured space

It is important to be aware that although pharmacies operating in clinics must be licensed by the state's Board of Pharmacy (except in West Virginia), the Board may issue a special or limited-use pharmacy permit when the scope, degree, or type of pharmacy practice or service to be provided is of a special, limited, or unusual nature as compared to a regular pharmacy service. In addition, the Board may approve an innovative or pilot program for a set approval period as an interim to full licensure. Most importantly, with any pharmacy model, a written manual of standard operating procedures will ensure consistency and compliant pharmacy operations.

- Financial and other resources

An On-Site Pharmacy requires a commitment of resources, both financial and, ideally, in-kind assistance and donations. Obviously, the more in-kind contributions and donations you receive toward the operation of the pharmacy, the fewer monetary funds will be required.

An On-Site Pharmacy requires:

1) Physical resources

A pharmacy requires dedicated space, equipment, security, and electronic and data capabilities including some type of inventory management system.

2) Staffing resources

In most states, a licensed pharmacist must be present any time the pharmacy is open. Ideally, staffing should be based on the anticipated number of patients to be served and include personnel for on-site eligibility verification, record maintenance, and overall pharmacy operation. Reach out to community resources such as hospitals, local retail pharmacies, and schools of pharmacy for volunteer recruitment possibilities. If a portion of your medication inventory will be obtained through individual PAP applications, there will need to be staff dedicated to processing and tracking these applications.

3) Medication resources

There must be a sufficient supply of medications available in the pharmacy, through either purchase or donation, in order for the pharmacy to adequately meet the medication needs of the patients and prescribers. Keeping in mind resources, it will be a deterrent to volunteer medical providers if the pharmacy is not able to ensure access to medications essential for the treatment of their patients.

4) Financial

In addition to traditional overhead costs, there will be costs associated with Board of Pharmacy licensure, dispensing supplies and equipment, and purchased medications.

5) Partnership Development

Partnership development is one of the most critical components to the success of an On-Site Pharmacy. Partnership opportunities exist for almost all aspects of your pharmacy operations. Whether you are recruiting volunteer pharmacists or PAP

coordination staff, obtaining supplies to build-out or equip the pharmacy space, advocating for free medications from pharmaceutical companies or discounted pricing from local retail pharmacies and wholesale medication suppliers, or pooling resources with other safety-net providers to make the most of existing medication resources, it is in the best interest of your organization, and your patients, to create a cohesive strategy that fully maximizes the opportunities for collaboration and success currently existing within your community and within the health and pharmaceutical industries.

Making the decision to provide medication assistance directly to your patients in your clinic setting is a commitment that requires a significant amount of time, effort, and resources. One thing that is important to remember is that no matter how comprehensive your medication access program may be, you will not be able to ensure that everyone has access to all his or her medication. However, by instituting a streamlined, efficient, and cost-effective process that delivers more medications to a greater number of patients in need, you will assist your clinic in meeting many of the medication needs of your patients, thereby impacting patient health outcomes and promoting positive and preventive healthcare service utilization.

As in all areas of healthcare, health reform may have a significant impact on access to pharmaceuticals by safety net clinics for their patients individually and/or collectively. Some of the motivating factors for pharmaceutical companies to participate in various programs may change as the economics of healthcare shifts. While these changes are unpredictable, it is essential that clinics maintain up-to-date awareness of the issues involved. Should changes occur, clinics would wish to develop plans that will help assure continuity of medication regimens for patients they have enrolled in their programs. ECHO encourages clinic leadership, both Board and staff, to actively pursue information related to pharmaceutical access in order to make the best decisions possible should such a need arise. National and state clinic associations are excellent sources of such information, which is just one more reason to take advantage of such membership if available.