

SOP 23

Managing Pharmacist Absence and Emergency Situations

Document Reference	SOP 23
Date of first issue	May 2013
Version	4
Review Date	November 2019
Next Review Date	November 2021- or sooner if required e.g. change in legislation, serious incident
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Pharmacy to which this SOP relates	
Date of Implementation in this Pharmacy	
Roles to which this SOP relates	All Pharmacy Staff

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1. Introduction

1.1 Context

- The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) require that a registered pharmacist must, at all times, be responsible for the management, control and safe keeping of all medicines in the pharmacy.
- In the event of the pharmacist being absent or requiring them to leave the pharmacy during opening hours, a procedure must be in place to ensure all pharmacy staff can manage the situation appropriately.
- Similarly, where an emergency situation arises it is important to have procedures in place to ensure continuity of service for patients.

1.2 Purpose

- To ensure that all pharmacy staff are aware of the procedures in place in the event of pharmacist absence or an emergency situation
- To ensure patient safety is maintained at all times
- To ensure the pharmacy remains legally compliant in such situations

This SOP covers

- The steps to follow when the pharmacist on duty is absent (e.g. due to illness or emergency) or must leave the pharmacy during opening hours.
- Reduced staffing levels
- Pharmacy closure
- Emergency contacts

This SOP must be used in conjunction with all relevant SOPs including:

- Allcare Key-holding Policy
- Allcare Employee Handbook
- Allcare Health and Safety Statement
- SOP 6 Refrigerator and Environmental Temperature Monitoring
- SOP 8 Working with Locum Pharmacists
- SOP 49 Data Protection

1.3 Scope

- This SOP applies to all pharmacy staff.
- It is the ultimate responsibility of the supervising pharmacist to ensure that all staff are appropriately trained and that the SOP is implemented.
- It is also the responsibility of the Supervising Pharmacist to ensure that this SOP reflects the day-to-day practice in their pharmacy.
- All pharmacists are expected to exercise their professional judgement when needed.

2. Procedure

2.1 Pharmacist Absence

- The presence of a registered pharmacist is legally required for a pharmacy to operate.
- The procedure detailed here should be followed should the pharmacist on duty not present at the pharmacy for their shift.
- Appendix 1 contains the Allcare Emergency Contact List. This should be updated regularly to take account of any change in personnel and circulated to all keyholders on each update.

- Key-holders should save the Emergency Contact List on their mobile phone as they will not have access to the pharmacy in the absence of a registered pharmacist.

2.1.1 Employee Pharmacists

- Employee (Supervising or Support) pharmacists who are running late for any reason, should contact a senior staff member and key holder as soon as possible providing an estimated time of arrival.
- If the pharmacist is unable to work their shift, they should notify their Territory Manager by telephone at least one hour before their shift begins (sooner if possible). Locum or relief pharmacist cover should be sought immediately.

2.1.2. Procedure for Non-Pharmacist staff

- If the pharmacist on duty does not arrive at the pharmacy at the beginning of their shift, a staff member should call the pharmacist (if their number is known to them) to determine an estimated time of arrival.
- If the pharmacist cannot be contacted, the Territory Manager should be contacted immediately, and locum or relief pharmacist cover arranged. If the Territory Manager cannot be reached, staff should contact the locum agency directly and request emergency locum cover.
- The pharmacy must remain closed until a pharmacist arrives to work in the pharmacy.
- All colleagues should be aware that they should not enter the pharmacy premises without a pharmacist present.

2.2 Emergency Situations

2.2.1 Reduced Staffing Levels

- Where an emergency situation arises impacting pharmacy staffing levels, the following protocols should be followed:
 - **Where the only pharmacist on duty is required to attend to an emergency or is injured themselves:**
 - Pharmacy service must be suspended for the duration of the emergency
 - The Territory Manager should be contacted immediately
 - Depending on the nature / expected duration of the emergency, an attempt can be made to cover the staffing gap by a locum or part-time pharmacist
 - **Where any staff member (including pharmacists) attend an emergency or are injured themselves but a pharmacist can remain on duty:**
 - Pharmacy service may be suspended for the duration of the emergency if less than one staff member can remain on duty
 - Depending on the nature / expected duration of the emergency, an attempt can be made to cover the staffing gap (from another pharmacy or locum agency)
- Where staffing levels are reduced to a level that is unmanageable for the pharmacy team, the Territory Manager should be notified immediately.
- Colleagues should inform customers and patients who present to the pharmacy of the situation and ask for their co-operation.
- The security of the pharmacy premises and colleagues should be considered in any decision made.
- The critical clinical activities (dispensing and the supply of medicines) should be prioritised in such circumstances and the pharmacist on duty should use

professional judgement to prioritise the dispensing of urgent and critical medications, e.g.

- Patients with non-urgent prescriptions (e.g. regular monthly items) may be asked to call back.
- Time slots may be allocated for methadone patients

2.2.2. Power loss and Fridge Failure

- Power losses resulting in refrigerator failure can result in significant wastage if not managed appropriately.
- Refer to **SOP 6 Refrigerator and Environmental Temperature Monitoring** for guidance on managing power loss to pharmacy refrigerators.

2.2.3 Flooding and Natural Disasters

- In the event of partial or complete flooding of the pharmacy
 - Pharmacy services should be suspended for the duration of the emergency
 - The Territory Manager and Security Auditor should be notified immediately of the closure
 - Every effort should be made to ensure patient information and records are intact (e.g. by retrieving back-up drives, prescriptions)
 - The premises should be secured and any health and safety risks to staff members should be considered.
 - Following the disruption, assess any risks before re-opening and contact Aramark to arrange repairs as necessary.

2.3 Pharmacy Closure

- In the event that it is necessary to close the pharmacy, the Territory Manager should be contacted immediately, and the Superintendent Pharmacist informed.
- It is the responsibility of the Supervising Pharmacist to ensure appropriate steps are taken to ensure the continuity of service to their patients should an emergency requiring closure occur.
- Neighbouring pharmacies should be alerted and advised that patients may be referred to them.
- Local GP surgeries should also be contacted and advised of when the pharmacy is expected to re-open.
- The HSE Community Care Pharmacist and the PSI should also be notified of the closure.
- A public notice advising patients where the nearest pharmacies are and giving a contact number for the pharmacist who will be dealing with queries in relation to accessing prescriptions, patient medication records (PMRs) and other clinical information.
- Special consideration should be given to high-risk and vulnerable patients. Arrangements may need to be made for their continuing care.
 - The HSE Addiction Services Liaison Pharmacist should be contacted to arrange re-allocation of methadone patients to a neighbouring pharmacy
 - The High Tech Hub (01 864 7135) may need to be contacted to arrange stock and prescription transfer to another pharmacy.

3 References

- PSI Policy on the Safe Keeping of Medicines and Associated Records during Pharmacy Cleaning and/or Merchandising (www.thepsi.ie)

4 SOP Amendments

- Version 2 – May 2015, required review, updated to include:
 - Change of name Business Manager to Territory Manager
- Version 3 – March 2017, required review, updated to include:
 - Reference to PSI Guidance
 - Reference to Allcare Pharmacy Key Holding Policy
- Version 4 – November 2019, required review.
 - SOP title change from 'Pharmacist Absenteeism' to 'Pharmacist Absence' – change reflected throughout SOP
 - Section 1.1 Context – reworded
 - Section 1.2 Purpose – added reference to legal compliance, added section 'This SOP covers...' and section 'This SOP is to be used in conjunction with...'
 - Section 1.4 References moved to Section 4
 - Section 2.1 Section replaced. Notice of absence changed to 1 hour before start of shift.
 - Section 2.2 Condensed
 - Section 2.3 Updated – reference to High Tech Hub and modified HSE Methadone Liaison to HSE Addiction Services Liaison Pharmacist