



Ask An Expert

Celebrating Supply Chain & Pharmacy Contributions to Quality Care

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I typically use this column as a forum to discuss supply chain strategy and hospital operations efficiencies. This month, however, I want to take the opportunity to say thank you to some of the hospital community's "behind-the-scenes" workers. October marks both National Healthcare Resource & Materials Management Week (October 2-8) and National Hospital & Health-System Pharmacy Week (October 16-22). While patients may never meet these folks during a hospital stay, the healthcare system would be unable to function without them.

Celebrating Materials Managers

Supply chain professionals are critical in supporting every hospital's patient care mission in addition to playing a significant role in the safety of patients, their families, and their clinicians. Of course, the number one responsibility of materials managers is to ensure that physicians and other clinical staff have the products they need when and where they need them. But the supply chain does so much more.

The supply chain has become a critical part of the hospital's strategic financial plan. In the distant past, materials managers frequently could increase savings through simple negotiations or standardization. But the supply chain, like the rest of the healthcare industry, has grown much more sophisticated in recent years. As healthcare procedures become more evidence-based, so too does hospital purchasing. Materials executives are increasingly participating in—and even leading—value analysis programs to examine supply chain spend critically. By evaluating outcomes data against cost, hospitals can assess whether their biggest expenditure items perform better than less expensive alternatives—creating a scientifically determined rationale for the procurement process while managing the needs of their clinical colleagues.

In times of supply chain disruption—like during severe weather emergencies (hurricanes) or product recalls—materials managers must leverage their supplier and GPO relationships while expertly monitoring the safety and security of inventory to ensure that patient care can be delivered seamlessly.

Honoring Our Pharmacists

Similarly, hospital pharmacists often work behind closed doors, yet their work is undeniably a critical component of patient care delivery. Pharmacists provide essential insight and oversight of medication management and the prevention of medication errors. Medication ordering, preparation, and delivery are multidisciplinary processes requiring multiple safeguards between the hospital pharmacy and the patient bedside. Along with internal medication management complexities, pharmacists must keep pace with the ever-evolving pharmaceutical industry. The FDA has already approved 21 new drugs this year alone—not counting approvals granted for new formulations or new uses of existing drugs and vaccines. Hospital pharmacists must continuously educate themselves about medications as well as contraindications, not to mention keeping track of adverse drug interactions, as more chronically ill patients manage their conditions with elaborate drug regimens.

Adding to these challenges is the recent, unprecedented drug shortage of nearly 150 medications, with limited or no availability over the past 18 months. To combat these shortages, pharmacists are being forced to change concentrations, formulations, package size, or use non-formulary medications—all while ensuring that none of these alternatives creates patient safety risks. While they may not meet their patients, hospital pharmacists certainly mete out the medications that are vital in saving patient lives every day.

So this October, I encourage you to enjoy the autumn leaves, Halloween pumpkin carving, and especially, the baseball post-season. But I also urge you to stop by your materials management office, and swing by the pharmacy to show your appreciation for your colleagues and the important work they do to support your hospital's patient care mission.

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