

Taking safety seriously in your workplace

OH&S risks differ in each pharmacy, but the safety of your staff and customers should always come first.



Monica Thadani is a pharmacy human resources specialist at Horizon Resourcing. For advice or feedback, call 03 9882 7977 or email monica@horizonresourcing.com.au. For more information on Horizon visit www.horizonresourcing.com.au.

Whether you are an employer or an employee, it's your duty of care to manage the safety of yourself, your employees and customers. Despite being healthcare providers, the personal safety of pharmacy staff is often overlooked.

Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) legislation often confuses small business owners. Do you really need OH&S policies in place for a small pharmacy? The answer is yes. The Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 requires all employers ensure their workplace is safe for those who enter the workplace including employees, customers, sales representatives/associates and tradespeople.

Breaching the OH&S Act can drastically affect your bottom line – maximum penalties are now \$943,290 for companies/businesses and \$188,658 for individuals – so it makes sense to invest in the right training and implementation.

Documentation

To maximise the safety of your employees and customers, readable and accessible policies need to be implemented, regularly revised and most importantly understood by staff.

Create a checklist that you can measure your pharmacy against. Involve your staff in this process as they can help identify potential safety threats and how you can eliminate or minimise them. This will encourage staff to report safety concerns and be prepared in an emergency. Regular follow-ups will allow you to check and review the standards.

Some of the most common safety concerns in pharmacies are falls and slips, manual handling, hazardous chemicals, emergency evacuations, and managing the risk of violence and armed robbery in the pharmacy.

Falls and slips

Falls and slips account for 25 per cent of all workplace injuries. All staff need to ensure floors are always clear, dry and level, to minimise accidents in the workplace. Walkway areas of the pharmacy should be free of clutter and spacious to minimise people tripping over things like boxes of stock, promotional stands and computer cords.

Spillages in the dispensary or front of shop need to be cleaned up immediately – staff should be trained so that when a safety threat arises they know how to deal with the situation quickly and effectively. Lighting is crucial to reducing falls and slips – is there adequate lighting in all areas of your pharmacy including the store room, housekeeping and outdoor areas? Are your staff wearing the appropriate footwear in the pharmacy?

Manual handling

Manual handling is required in many jobs. This includes repetitive movements and lifting and carrying stock and is a huge contributor to many workplace injuries and claims. Employee tasks need to be assessed to ensure they are not too repetitive – one way to avoid this is to have rotating rosters to vary the workload activities for staff and include regular breaks. Retail work can be physically taxing so it's important that employers provide their employees with the necessary training and techniques relating to manual handling and operating equipment. For example, shelving and counter benches should be at a comfortable height to minimise injury that may result from regularly bending or reaching up. Heavy boxes should be half unpacked before being moved to other areas of the shop.

Hazardous chemicals

Many chemicals in the dispensary can be hazardous so it is crucial to make a list that states each dangerous chemical's name, uses and harmful effects and how employees can protect themselves and customers from potential spillages. Similar to the importance of wearing appropriate footwear, your staff needs appropriate protective wear/safety equipment and training to handle, store and dispose of these chemicals.

Emergency evacuations

In an emergency situation, pharmacy staff need to know how to remain calm, how to react and what steps to take to ensure their safety. Ideally, there should be a nominated

staff member to manage the evacuation process. There should be clear signage with a step-by-step evacuation guide.

In an emergency the person responsible should direct customers/employees to the safest exit as quickly as possible, account for all staff on duty and decide if and when it is safe to return. All employees should be aware of evacuation procedures and practise drills regularly. This is especially important in pharmacies where there are often lots of part-time or casual staff.

Violence and robbery

Pharmacies are becoming more susceptible to violence and armed robberies, which threatens the health and wellbeing of your employees and customers. It also affects the trading and reputation of your pharmacy and the associated costs incurred in workers compensation and staff leaving due to physical/mental distress.

Offenders are usually after controlled drugs or cash. A safe pharmacy layout discourages violence and robbery – this can be done by installing a time delay safe, designing a dispensary with restricted customer access, implementing safety devices to monitor movements in high-theft areas of the pharmacy and eliminating hiding spots in your pharmacy due to poor lighting or gondolas placed in awkward positions.

Effective security systems (alarms, video monitors, speed dials) need to be accessible to all employees. It is also helpful to have a list of important numbers such as the local police station and the owner's emergency contact details near the phone in the event of violence or robbery. Safety can also be improved by limiting the amount of cash kept in the tills and hanging signs that state minimal cash levels are kept. Finally no staff member should open or close the pharmacy on their own. **R**

