

Pharmacy Board of Tasmania

Policy on Appropriate Workloads for Pharmacists

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to registrants on appropriate workloads in the interests of patient safety and maintenance of high professional standards.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Pharmacists Registration Act 2001 (the Act) and the Pharmacy Code of May 2008.

GUIDELINES

1. The Board expects registrants to observe safe and sustainable workloads, in the interests of patient safety and maintenance of high professional standards.
2. Pharmacists must maintain safe dispensing procedures at all times and must not allow workload pressures to compromise this obligation.
3. In all circumstances each pharmacist must exercise their own professional judgment on whether they are practising in a safe manner. The Board expects pharmacists to reflect on their practice with 'duty of care' as the overriding mandate at all times – even where there may be pressure from the owner or manager of the pharmacy in which the pharmacist is working.
4. Pharmacy proprietors should review their businesses on a regular basis to ensure that they are adequately staffed to meet demand for services. Pharmacists must ensure that they do not contribute to unsafe practices of staff under their employ or supervision by requiring them to meet unrealistic or unsafe workloads.
5. Breaches of these guidelines may constitute unprofessional conduct.

BACKGROUND

The Board has given consideration to setting mandatory standards for maximum pharmacist workloads.

The Board does not support mandating a maximum dispensing volume which is a simplistic approach to a complex issue.

The Board is of the opinion that a safe workload is dependent on many factors including the:

- Number and experience of pharmacists
- Number and training of dispensary/pharmacy assistants
- Number of dispensing stations in use
- Design of the dispensary
- Nature of the prescriptions being processed
- Number of dose administration aids being packed
- Proportion of scripts which require counselling
- Level of customer interaction required

Workload imposes pressure to dispense quickly, often at the expense of good dispensing practice. Failure to take due care and attention, omitting essential checking and scanning

processes and abandonment of medication review and counselling components of the dispensing process can compromise overall patient safety.

Identified contributing factors to dispensing error include:

- Heavy prescription loads
- Extremely low prescription loads
- Emphasis on meeting administrative obligations
- Interruptions and distractions
- Pressure from patients
- Tiredness
- Poor lighting
- Similarity in drug names
- Similarity in packaging
- Adjacent storage of drugs with similar names
- Inadequate breaks.

Pharmacists should review their activities to ensure that their workload enables them to meet the relevant competency standards as described in the Competency Standards for Pharmacists in Australia 2003 with specific reference to “manage work issues and interpersonal relationships in pharmacy practice” and “apply organizational skills in the practice of pharmacy”. Both standards are relevant to, and in the latter case specific to workload.

Pharmacists should remember that compliance with PSA professional practice standards is a mandatory requirement of the Pharmacy Code. Guidelines for safe practice and good dispensing may also be found in publications and websites of Pharmacy Defence Ltd and other professional organizations. The various statements and standards are consistent.

When investigating complaints, the Board may review dispensing volumes and staffing levels. The Board would be concerned if pharmacists were consistently dispensing in excess of 150 prescriptions per eight hour day per pharmacist on an ongoing basis and/or working long hours (e.g. more than 60 hours per week per pharmacist) without evidence of sufficient strategies or teamwork in place to ensure that the quality and safety of the services they provide were not compromised. Numbers of trained support staff, implementation of dispensing quality standards and a well planned dispensary layout may support a higher dispensing throughput.

Approved by Board 4 March 2009