

PHARMACIUM DISPENSARY CORNER #4



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THE INNER DISPENSARY – THE ENGINE OF THE PHARMACY

This Dispensary Corner issue will look at the very heart of the pharmacy – the engine room of the dispensary that is responsible for the ‘grunt work’ required to get through a large volume of prescriptions. Picture some of the busiest days in your pharmacy, eg, the Thursday before Good Friday public holiday – or most days in the second half of December! These are typically some of the days of highest script volume for community pharmacy. When you check the script count at the end of such a day, these often record-breaking statistics can only be achieved by a well-oiled ‘machine’ – that is, the cohesive team and production line of the dispensary.

So what does it take to achieve a high-performance dispensary operation? To answer this, let’s first consider what functions are performed in this part of the dispensary, and which part of the overall workflow this represents.

Inner dispensary operation

Often referred to as the ‘back of house’, the inner dispensary is where the majority of high-volume and complex dispensing that isn’t suitable for processing in a direct-dispense scenario occurs – such as the quicker dispensing at scripts in, which we discussed in the last issue. Examples of the type of script processing include:

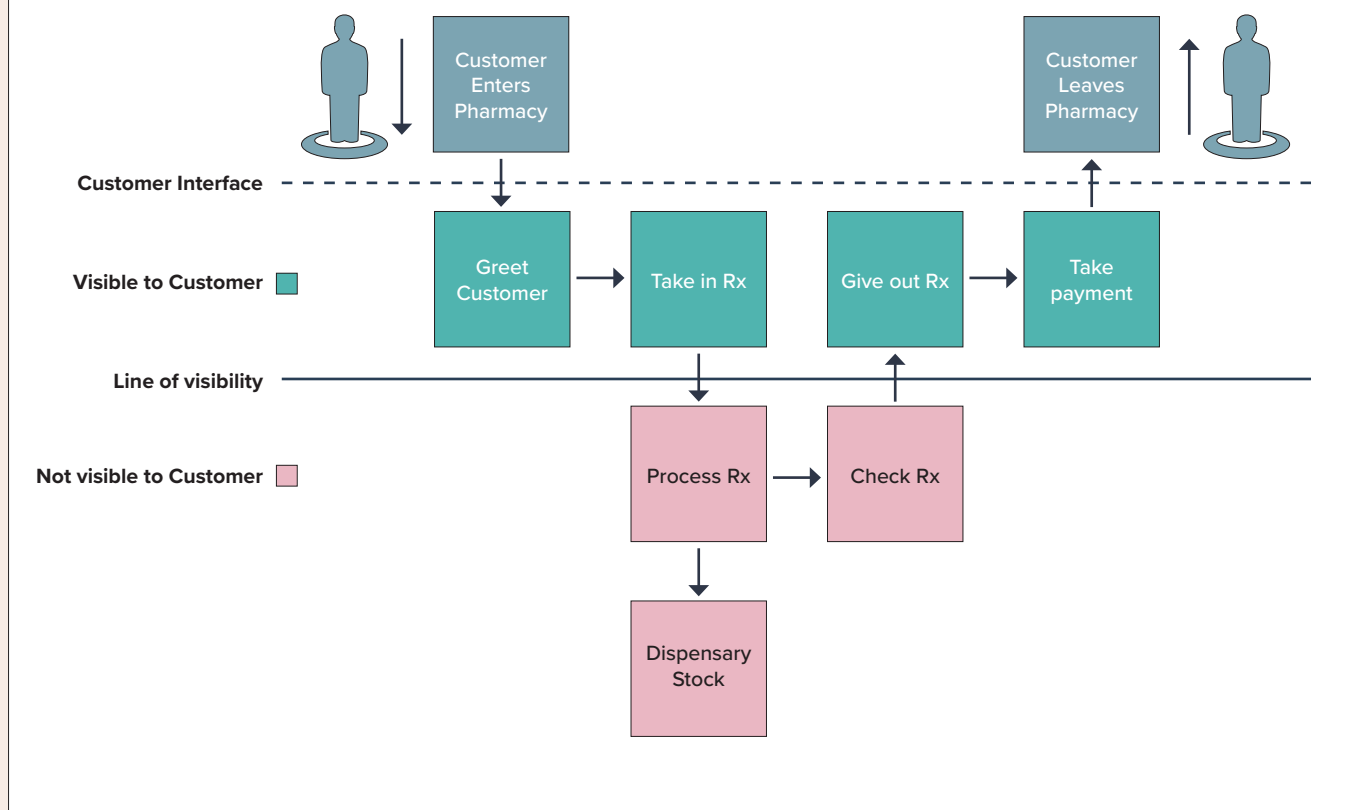
- Bulk prescription orders: multiple medications (more than three), variety of prescriptions (eg, own repeats with outside repeats, with new script and/or hospital scripts), multiple patients (eg, husband and wife, each with multiple items).
- Complex prescriptions: items requiring additional administrative work to process (eg, Schedule 8, clozapine, etc).
- Script reminder service: prescriptions that require preparation before the patient arrives at the pharmacy.
- DAA prescriptions: dispensing

of medications required for packing DAAs and reconciling owing prescriptions.

If we were to look at the dispensary workflow in the context of the customer journey map, this back of house dispensing lies behind the lines of visibility from a customer perspective. So while the scripts in and scripts out service areas are the high customer engagement points (and where the pharmacist should be), the bulk dispensing area sits behind this customer interface. But, crucially, it’s no less important in contributing to the overall customer experience. This is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows a simplified service blueprint diagram of the prescription customer journey and elements of the workflow occurring behind the line of visibility.

In terms of both operational efficiency and effectiveness, in an ideal scenario, this area of the dispensary would be predominantly operated by

Figure 1: Service Blueprint for a Prescription



dispensary technicians – as it is the skilled technicians who are often the backbone of a busy dispensary and fundamental in enabling the pharmacist to have time at the customer interface, ie, the scripts out or scripts in areas. However, to be able to keep this engine of the pharmacy humming along nicely, the inner dispensary requires the right configuration.

Inner dispensary configuration

In an area of high activity and resource density, tasks that are constantly repeated need to be made as effortless as possible. This means that the right design and the right equipment are usually required in equal measure. Notice how the latter enables the former, and the former allows benefit from the latter?

At a macro level, the number one objective is to bring everything involved in this process as close as possible (within arm's reach in a perfect world) to the person dispensing. This reduces time used on unproductive activities, such as walking (unless you're trying to save money on a gym membership,

of course). In an era when efficiency and productivity are key, wooden shelving with a five-metre distance between A and Z simply does not work to achieve this. Worse still, it can have a negative domino effect on the rest of dispensary – think of the effect on the customer experience if the process behind the scenes takes too long. Modern storage solutions, coupled with close proximity to other commonly accessed resources, are key to optimal throughput of the prescription. Ideally, multiple staff should be able to dispense and access stock without major interference to one another.

It should also be noted that this segment of the workflow should be free of distraction. Although interruptions occur and cannot be eliminated entirely, the volume and complexity of scripts processed in the inner dispensary require staff to work uninterrupted – this is not the place for direct customer engagement and appropriate separation of these work stations is required, eg, with glass partitions or screening.

At a micro level, the theory of bringing everything within arm's reach continues. Consider what is required at each

dispense station that will maximise the dispensers' productivity: printers, C&A labels, staplers, bins, shredders, repeat backings, access to specific software platforms, etc. In addition, consider how the prescription travels through the production line. Can the dispenser easily reach for the next basket of scripts? Can they easily pass it on to the checking pharmacist? All this should be factored into the design of the workstation.

The configuration of all of these elements within the inner dispensary can have a significant impact on the performance of the overall workflow. Everything should align with the path of least resistance and allow for uninterrupted focus. Good design in this area will increase dispensing speed, reduce interference between dispensing staff, reduce errors, and make for a happier team – particularly on those record-breaking script days! Finally, and perhaps most importantly, careful consideration of the operation of the inner dispensary ultimately contributes to a superior experience for your pharmacy customer.