

Guidance to ensure a safe and effective pharmacy team



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The General Pharmaceutical Council is the regulator for pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and registered pharmacies in England, Scotland and Wales. As part of our role, we set the standards that pharmacy professionals have to meet throughout their careers.

About this guidance

This guidance explains what the pharmacy owner¹ should do to ensure a safe and effective pharmacy team and meet the standards set out under Principle 2 of the standards for registered pharmacies.

The guidance is for pharmacy owners, who are responsible for making sure the whole pharmacy team – both registered pharmacy professionals and all unregistered staff – provide safe and effective care and pharmacy services.

We also believe this guidance will be helpful for other organisations who employ pharmacy professionals or provide pharmacy services across a range of settings – although we do not regulate all these settings.

You should read this guidance alongside our **standards for registered pharmacies**, which pharmacy owners must meet, and our **inspection decision-making framework**. The standards for registered pharmacies are about creating and maintaining the right environment, both organisational and physical, for the safe and effective practice of pharmacy.

¹ A pharmacy owner may be a registered pharmacy professional; a pharmacist as a sole trader, partner or director, or a pharmacy technician as a partner or director

in Scotland; or may be unregistered as a partner or a director in Scotland; or a 'body corporate'.



Our standards for pharmacy professionals describe how safe and effective care is delivered through 'person-centred' professionalism. Therefore, you must also be familiar with our **standards for pharmacy professionals** and the **guidance we have published** on our website to help pharmacy professionals apply our standards and meet their professional obligations.

As the pharmacy owner, you should be aware of this guidance as you are responsible for making sure it is followed. Everyone in the pharmacy team should be familiar with the guidance, including managers with delegated responsibility. If the registered pharmacy is owned by a 'body corporate' (for example a company or an NHS organisation) you should make the superintendent pharmacist aware of this guidance.

Introduction

Every member of the pharmacy team provides a vital service to patients and the public. Although registered pharmacies may have different ownership structures, it is important that the culture and processes within the pharmacy deliver safe and effective care to patients and the public.

A pharmacy owner's first responsibility is to ensure patient safety. In practice, this includes making sure:

- each pharmacy has enough skilled and qualified staff to provide safe and effective pharmacy services
- staff can meet their professional obligations and can raise concerns in an environment which encourages openness, honesty and continuing development

The needs of people who receive care from registered pharmacies, and the way pharmacy services are provided, continue to evolve and change. As such, the roles needed to deliver pharmacy services are developing to reflect these changes. Training and development for pharmacy teams should be flexible in responding to these changes, to give staff in the team the knowledge and skills to meet the new challenges and opportunities they face. Owners need also to continually assess staffing levels

and the appropriateness of the skills mix within the pharmacy to ensure patient safety.

Effective team working is an essential part of providing good-quality, person-centred care. Pharmacy owners and pharmacy professionals are best placed to identify the needs of patients and the public, and the training and development their teams need to deliver person-centred care and remain competent in the interests of their patients. They also have a shared responsibility to make sure that any member of staff involved in the sale and supply of medicines has the knowledge and skills to carry out their tasks safely and effectively. This includes unregistered staff, who are often the first point of contact with patients and the public.



Accountability

Pharmacy owners

Pharmacy owners are responsible for ensuring the safe and effective provision of pharmacy services from a registered pharmacy. They are accountable for making sure that the standards for registered pharmacies are met, and for creating and supporting an environment in which pharmacy professionals can demonstrate their professionalism and deliver person-centred care. They are also responsible for setting the management framework within which pharmacy professionals can carry out their professional responsibilities and people in leadership and management roles can operate.

If the pharmacy is owned by a body corporate, the directors must assure themselves that the standards for registered pharmacies are being met.

As a pharmacy owner you should consider the context of each individual pharmacy. This includes:

- the range of services provided
- the skill mix and number of staff in the pharmacy team
- most importantly, the needs of patients and people who use pharmacy services

You should use the resources you have (which includes staff and their skill mix) to ensure safe and effective outcomes for patients. You must also make sure your staff have the necessary training appropriate to their roles.

Your own accountability does not affect the important responsibility of individual pharmacy professionals to contribute to the education, training and development of the team or of others, and to promote and encourage a culture of learning and development.

Leadership and management roles

We realise that for anyone operating a registered pharmacy there will always be competing demands. These may be professional, managerial, legal or commercial. However, medicines are not ordinary items of commerce. Along with pharmacy services, the supply of medicines is a fundamental healthcare service.

In a limited, or public limited, company the board of directors has a significant role in and ongoing responsibility for making sure people receive safe and effective care from registered pharmacies. The Companies Act, and other relevant legislation, sets out the legal responsibilities for directors. In a pharmacy where healthcare is being delivered to the public, there is **further guidance for directors about their extra responsibilities in delivering a public service**. This applies whether they are in a private or a voluntary organisation.

Staff in leadership or managerial roles, such as branch or area positions, may be pharmacy professionals or unregistered, and are involved in how pharmacy services are developed and delivered. This guidance will help all those who work in leadership and management roles to know what we expect them to do.

Pharmacy professionals

Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are regulated professionals and must meet the standards for pharmacy professionals. This includes demonstrating leadership when providing safe and effective care. Pharmacy professionals should contribute to the education, training and development of the team, or of others, and must delegate tasks only to people who are competent and appropriately trained or in training. They must also exercise proper oversight.

Pharmacy professionals should have open and honest conversations with the pharmacy owner about anything which could affect their ability to provide the full range of services that the pharmacy provides.

Unregistered staff

Unregistered pharmacy staff do not have the same responsibilities, as they are not regulated by the GPhC. But we expect them to meet our training requirements according to their role, to make sure they provide safe and effective care.

Unregistered pharmacy staff work in a variety of roles including as dispensers, medicines counter assistants, delivery drivers and pharmacy managers. They may work full time, part time or occasionally, and their responsibilities may include:

- providing information and advice on symptoms and products
- selling and supplying medicines
- receiving and collecting prescriptions, including assembling and dispensing prescribed items
- delivering medicines
- ordering, receiving and storing medicines and pharmacy stock
- leading and managing teams

Unregistered pharmacy staff are accountable firstly to their employer, who will generally be the pharmacy owner or an NHS trust or health board.

Unregistered staff should, within the resources provided, keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date. They should only carry out roles for which they have the necessary skills and competency, or, if they are in training for that role, with appropriate oversight from a qualified member of the pharmacy team.



Guidance to ensure a safe and effective pharmacy team

This guidance is set out under Principle 2 of the standards for registered pharmacies.

Principle 2: Staff are empowered and competent to safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of patients and the public

The staff you employ and the people you work with are key to the safe and effective practice of pharmacy. Staff members, and anyone involved in providing pharmacy services, must be competent and empowered to safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of patients and the public in all that they do.

Standards

- 2.1 There are enough staff, suitably qualified and skilled, for the safe and effective provision of the pharmacy services provided
- 2.2 Staff have the appropriate skills, qualifications and competence for their role and the tasks they carry out, or are working under the supervision of another person while they are in training
- 2.3 Staff can comply with their own professional and legal obligations and are empowered to exercise their professional judgement in the interests of patients and the public
- 2.4 There is a culture of openness, honesty and learning
- 2.5 Staff are empowered to provide feedback and raise concerns about meeting these standards and other aspects of pharmacy services
- 2.6 Incentives or targets do not compromise the health, safety or wellbeing of patients and the public, or the professional judgement of staff

1. Setting staffing levels and responding to concerns about patient safety


The number of staff and the skill mix needed to provide safe and effective pharmacy services will vary significantly between pharmacies, depending on the context in which each pharmacy is operating. As the pharmacy owner you should consider the individual context of each pharmacy, including:

- the volumes of dispensing
 - the sale or supply of medicines over the counter
 - how and where medicines are supplied to patients (for example 'hub and spoke' or internet pharmacies)
 - the changing demands throughout the day
 - the population served by the pharmacy, including vulnerable patients
 - changes in the number of patients and their individual needs
 - the use of technology, including robotics
 - the range of different services provided
 - the different sets of skills, knowledge and experience within the team
 - the ongoing learning and development of the pharmacy team
 - previous incidents and errors, and the reasons for them
- feedback from patients and members of the public

This means you have to take a tailored approach to staffing levels; one that is flexible and makes sure people receive safe and effective care from every registered pharmacy.

To meet the standards under Principle 2 we expect you as the pharmacy owner to make sure:

1. you carry out risk assessments that are specific to the pharmacy and the team working there
2. the way you manage risks includes procedures to make judgements about the appropriate number of staff and the skill mix
3. you develop, working with the responsible pharmacist, a staffing plan which takes account of how you manage risks and the individual context of the pharmacy
4. the responsible pharmacist and all members of the pharmacy team are aware of the staffing plan for their individual pharmacy
5. each registered pharmacy has a contingency plan for short- and long-term staff absence, whether planned or unplanned

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6. you actively review the actual number of staff in the pharmacy who are competent and trained to deliver the pharmacy services provided, against the staffing plan – in line with changing services, workload, feedback and concerns
 7. all members of the pharmacy team know who they should contact within their individual pharmacy or wider organisation to raise concerns, without fear. This includes when staffing plans are not effective, and staffing levels and the skill mix may no longer be appropriate
 8. everyone in the pharmacy team has the knowledge and confidence to raise concerns about the quality of pharmacy services and, in particular, concerns about patient safety
 9. there are systems, evidence and records to show the steps taken to deal with any concerns raised, so patient safety is not compromised. This includes recording occasions when the pharmacy is closed during normal hours of operation
 10. feedback is provided to the pharmacy team about concerns raised and how the concerns have been dealt with

11. the reasons for any dispensing errors are assessed and appropriate remedial action taken to learn from these. This includes action to change the number or skill mix of the pharmacy team when necessary
12. the pharmacy team record, review and learn from near misses, mistakes or incidents

2. Leadership and management roles

Pharmacy owners must make sure that pharmacy professionals who work for them can meet their own professional and legal obligations and are able to exercise their professional judgement in the interests of patients and the public.

Managers who have responsibility for leading and managing teams, and for co-ordinating many aspects of the day-to-day pharmacy operations, have an important role to play. Members of the board, people in leadership roles and managers have significant responsibilities, and influence over the culture, practices and environment of the pharmacy, and how the safe and effective delivery of pharmacy services is maintained.

To meet the standards under Principle 2, we expect you as the pharmacy owner to make sure those in leadership and management roles:

1. understand the legal and regulatory framework they are working in and the responsibilities of the pharmacy owner
2. are familiar with the standards for registered pharmacies and with this guidance
3. are familiar with the standards for pharmacy professionals, and the supporting guidance that we publish
4. understand that pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, as regulated pharmacy professionals, have

professional responsibilities. These include making patient safety a priority and taking action to protect the wellbeing of patients and the public

5. understand that pharmacy professionals are accountable to the GPhC for meeting the standards for pharmacy professionals
6. make sure everyone in the pharmacy team knows and understands the procedures in place in the pharmacy, as well as their own duties and responsibilities and those of other members of the team
7. make sure pharmacy professionals and unregistered members of staff are supported and empowered to handle challenging situations confidently and professionally, whether that means having the right conversations with managers or knowing when and how to raise a concern with the pharmacy owner
8. understand how to manage appropriately any personal or organisational goals, incentives or targets without compromising the professional judgement of staff to deliver safe and effective care
9. make sure people who use pharmacy services can easily see who staff are and the role they are carrying out

3. Maintaining a person-centred environment

Having staff with the right knowledge and skills is one part of being able to provide safe and effective care. It is equally important for the pharmacy team to demonstrate the attitudes and behaviours that people who use pharmacy services expect to see. Behaviours and interpersonal skills – such as effective communication and professionalism – can put patients at ease and make a difference to the care they receive.

To meet the standards under Principle 2, we expect you as the pharmacy owner to make sure everyone in the pharmacy team:

1. provides compassionate care which is adapted to meet the needs of each person
2. can adjust their style of communication, and recognise and reduce barriers to effective communication
3. is aware of safeguarding procedures and can identify people who may be vulnerable.
4. helps individuals to make informed choices about their health and wellbeing
5. works with other healthcare providers to provide 'joined-up' care and demonstrate effective team working

6. is encouraged to ask patients appropriate questions to make sure they are giving suitable advice
7. recognises and values diversity, and respects cultural differences – making sure that every person is treated fairly whatever their values and beliefs
8. understands the principles of privacy and confidentiality² and puts these into practice
9. takes steps to maintain privacy and confidentiality and to ensure discussions are not overheard by people not involved in the person's care
10. understands their responsibilities for keeping records up to date, complete and accurate, and for storing information in line with established procedures

² **Overview of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**

4. Knowledge, skills and competence

The GPhC sets the minimum training requirements for pharmacy staff. However, we also know that education and training does not stand still, and must reflect developments in medicines and technology and the diverse nature of pharmacy services. Pharmacy owners must make sure staff have the appropriate knowledge, skills and competence for their role and the tasks they carry out, or that they are working under the supervision of an appropriately trained person while they are in training.

Education and training requirements for such a diverse workforce should be flexible and proportionate to allow the pharmacy team to respond to changes in pharmacy practice.

4.1 Initial education and training requirements

To meet the standards under Principle 2, we expect you as the pharmacy owner to make sure:

1. you understand the options for relevant training provision, so you can make decisions on what courses are appropriate for your staff. This may include speaking directly to course providers and pharmacy professionals about training needs
2. a role-specific induction is carried out as soon as possible for all new members of the pharmacy team
3. you recognise and address differences

in competency requirements for specific practice settings and for the types of services being delivered in that setting

4. you assess the competence of staff when they start in their role, and work in partnership with a pharmacy professional to make an informed decision about what further knowledge or training staff may need. This should include considering the staff member's previous education and training, their qualifications and their work experience
5. initial training covers a common set of skills and abilities including professionalism, good communication skills, and effective working in multi-professional teams
6. unregistered pharmacy staff who need education and training to meet the required competency level for their role are enrolled on an appropriate training programme within three months of starting in their role
7. unregistered pharmacy staff who are involved in dispensing and supplying medicines are:
 - competent to a level equivalent to the elements of the relevant knowledge and skills of a nationally recognised Level 2 qualification in England and Wales, or a Level 5 qualification in Scotland, or

- training towards this and working under the supervision of a qualified member of staff

8. you keep complete and accurate records of training for all staff, which are accessible to those who need them

4.2 Learning and development

To maintain a competent and empowered pharmacy team, it is vital that learning and development continues beyond initial education and training. Pharmacy owners, working with pharmacy professionals, should:

- encourage and enable all staff – particularly those still in training – to reflect on their performance, knowledge and skills, and to identify learning and development needs, and
- support them in meeting those needs, to enable them to carry out their role

Staff should be empowered to use their judgement, make decisions where appropriate and be proactive in the interests of patients and the public.

To meet the standards under Principle 2, we expect you as the pharmacy owner to make sure:

1. you understand the learning and development needs of your team and take appropriate steps to meet those

needs, having decided whether you can make protected time available for learning and development

2. pharmacy staff work within the limits of their competence and refer to other, more appropriate, staff when they need to
3. everyone in the pharmacy team, with the help of other members of the team, within the resources provided, keeps their knowledge and skills up to date
4. managers have the competence, skills and experience needed to carry out their role
5. essential elements of training are identified for each role within the team, and these are actively reviewed and reassessed in response to changing needs and circumstances, and any changes are made in a timely manner
6. you can demonstrate that learning and development is taking place
7. individual and team development plans are in place to make sure pharmacy staff are not carrying out roles they have not been trained for
8. you take a tailored approach to learning and development which is continued throughout individuals' employment to make sure the knowledge and skills of pharmacy staff remain up to date

If you have questions or comments about the content of this guidance, please contact our Policy and Standards Team:

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We have also produced guidance on other topics that you may find useful:

www.pharmacyregulation.org/standards/guidance



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