

Issue Brief

Pharmacy Staffing Ratios



The Issue

- Pharmacy staffing ratios are requirements for the number of prescriptions that can be filled by pharmacists and technicians within certain periods of time, record-keeping requirements and specified break periods. Periodically, changes are made to reflect technology, education and work environments.
- Recently, the *Chicago Tribune* conducted a series of investigations testing 255 retail pharmacies to see how often stores would dispense dangerous drug combinations without warning patients.
- Among the major retail pharmacy chains investigated, 52% failed to warn reporters about the dangerous drug interactions that were potentially harmful and fatal.
- According to Illinois law, pharmacies are required to conduct several safety checks, including whether the dose is reasonable and whether the medication might interact with other drugs the patient is taking. The investigation suggested that pharmacists frequently raced through legally required drug safety reviews, or skipped them altogether and rarely asked patients what other medications they were using.
- Pharmacists told the reporters that they felt overwhelmed by pressures at the workplace to work quickly and meet quotas.
- As a result, both the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois are considering new regulations on pharmacies. These similar proposals would amend the Pharmacy Practice Act to mandate staffing levels in pharmacy operations, set limits on prescriptions filled per hour, and identify parameters with regarding meal times and rest breaks for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

Our Position

- **Patient safety is extremely important to Presence Health.** Presence Health supports the concept of insuring pharmacists are well-trained, fill prescriptions properly and take time to consider and consult with patients on their prescriptions. We currently employ numerous quality checks and safeguards to assure that the right medication reaches the right patient at the right time. For example:
 - Every organization under the state's existing Hospital Licensing Act is required to have a Pharmacy and Therapeutic Committee that oversees and evaluates all pharmacy processes from dispensing medications to patient and family teaching.
 - Presence Health uses sophisticated electronic medical record systems that ensure the right medication to the right patient with interfaces that provide ordering guidance to prescribers with automated safeguards that identifies drug-drug interactions, dosing errors, and possible allergic reactions prior to the order reaching the pharmacy; and critical pharmacy review conducted in real time to order with ability to relay any concerning inquires directly to prescriber.
 - Every licensed health care professional, including pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, receives a background and certification check before hire and are subjected to ongoing peer review and competency and proficiency evaluations post-hire.
 - Prescription/medication orders reviews are conducted at a minimum every 24 hours by nursing and pharmacy staff, with interdisciplinary rounds occurring daily at the patient's bedside to confirm therapeutic objectives and outcomes, including potential interactions.

- **We respect our associates.** We recognize that pharmacists at times face workflow issues and we strive to be partners to find solutions when that occurs. Presence Health uses dynamic quality and patient safety programs aimed at facilitating robust staff teams and learning environments to identify near misses, adverse events, including medication errors, and unsafe processes to prevent the occurrence of any future event.
- **Hospital pharmacies operate differently than retail pharmacies.** It is important to distinguish between the rules and regulations that apply to hospital pharmacies. For example, each individual aspirin dispensed in a hospital counts as a prescription filled. New requirements such as a limit of 10 prescriptions per hour for one pharmacist would not work in a hospital environment.
- **Unnecessary mandates increase costs without achieving medication safety.** Proposals that don't differentiate between retail pharmacies and hospital pharmacies are adding unnecessary operational constraints, significantly increasing costs with minimal evidence-based strategies for enhancing medication safety. Presence Health would advocate for these proposals to exclude hospital pharmacies or retail pharmacies located on a hospital campus due to the narrow patient populations that are served.