



March 26, 2007

Rhonda Schwartz  
Senior Producer  
ABC News  
147 Columbus Ave  
New York, NY 10023

Dear Rhonda:

Thank you for offering CVS/pharmacy the opportunity to respond to 20/20's upcoming report about quality assurance issues at retail pharmacies. We share your desire to ensure the public is informed about prescription safety.

Prescription safety is a health care industry issue and one in which every pharmacy in the nation must continue striving to improve. I would like to share with you several of the efforts we have made to provide our pharmacists with resources to help them fill prescriptions accurately.

#### **QUALITY ASSURANCE PROGRAM**

Over the course of several years, CVS has designed and invested millions of dollars in a comprehensive quality assurance program to enhance patient safety. This program is fully integrated into our prescription fulfillment process, of which the major elements are:

- organized workflow
- standardized processes
- state of the art technology
- staff training
- patient counseling
- clinical support
- incident reporting and review

*(See attached step-by-step overview of our quality assurance process)*

#### **ON-GOING EFFORTS TO ENHANCE QUALITY**

We are constantly examining and implementing new and innovative ways to further improve quality. For example, just recently we enhanced our pharmacy system to further support the accurate filling of prescriptions. Examples of these enhancements include:

- A new accuracy scan process that matches the bar code on the manufacturer package to the bar code on a patient's prescription label receipt. This feature minimizes the possibility of dispensing the incorrect medication to a patient. *(See attached for details)*
- Enhanced computer system and workflow process used by pharmacists to perform final verification of a prescription order. This system enhancement improves the layout and presentation of prescription information so that it appears on the screen in an easy to read, organized and logical manner. The new process helps our pharmacists to focus on each individual critical review area. *(See attached for details)*

- CVS/pharmacy is leading efforts for the adoption of electronic prescribing. We believe e-prescribing minimizes the potential for prescription errors by eliminating legibility issues during communication between physicians and pharmacies. All 6,100 CVS/pharmacy locations are enabled to accept electronically generated prescriptions. In fact, CVS fills 40% of all electronically transmitted prescriptions that are communicated through Surescripts, the nation's largest e-prescribing network.
- Over the past year, the Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP), a nationally respected independent organization dedicated to promoting patient safety, has been providing ongoing consulting services to CVS, including store visits, observations and recommendations to ensure continual quality improvement in our prescription fulfillment process.

## **PATIENT COUNSELING PROGRAMS**

CVS recognizes the importance of the pharmacist-patient counseling relationship. It is our policy to offer every customer who fills a prescription at CVS the opportunity to receive counseling from their pharmacist. Any incident you may have observed where a customer was not provided an offer to counsel is unacceptable to us and we will take immediate steps to reinforce our policy on this issue.

It is important to raise consumer awareness of the pharmacist's availability and readiness to provide counseling to their patients on their medications. To help accomplish this, we are exploring a variety of counseling programs in markets across the country aimed at improving outcomes.

In one pilot program, patients are informed of who their pharmacist on duty is at the time of dropping off their prescription and are asked if they have any questions or concerns they would like to discuss with the pharmacist. Customers are also provided with the pharmacist's personalized business card in the event they have questions once they leave the pharmacy. As part of this program, our pharmacists conduct in-store health and wellness sessions as another way to enhance their relationships with their patients.

In other markets, our pharmacists are participating in programs in which they proactively educate their patients on specific disease states, such as diabetes. These counseling sessions include a review on how to properly use the prescribed medication, and an assessment of a patient's understanding of their treatment with a goal of educating our customers to help improve their overall health and well-being.

We also have initiated a program in some additional markets where our pharmacy computer system recognizes every new prescription or change in medication therapy, and flags those orders to facilitate counseling between our pharmacists and patients.

## **THE ROLE OF PHARMACY SUPPORT PERSONNEL**

Pharmacy support personnel perform non-professional aspects of the prescription filling process. Our pharmacy workflow specifically defines the roles and responsibilities for all pharmacy staff members. Competent technician support has been an invaluable resource in all areas of healthcare for many years.

There are two levels of support personnel working in our pharmacies. Pharmacy Sales Associates mostly perform clerical duties associated with cashiering, while the more advanced Pharmacy Technicians support the prescription filling process by completing data entry, third party resolution, as well as several other administrative functions.

Pharmacists are responsible for verifying the accuracy of all completed prescriptions, including a review of potential drug and allergy interactions. Support offered by pharmacy technicians allows our pharmacists the ability to focus on duties specific to their role.

Our training program for pharmacy technicians involves a rigorous curriculum designed to meet regulatory standards. Training methods include classroom instruction, self-paced learning and on

the job training. To achieve technician position certification, candidates must demonstrate an understanding of their training to ensure they have mastered the skills necessary to be successful.

While all states do not require national certification, we strongly encourage all pharmacy support staff members to obtain National Certification through Pharmacy Technician Certification Board. As an incentive, CVS will pay the registration fee for eligible candidates. In addition, we provide employees three study guides in order to help them successfully pass the exam.

## **TAKING ACTION AFTER THE RARE OCCURRENCE OF AN INCIDENT**

A critical first step to preventing errors is understanding how they occur. In the unfortunate event that a prescription incident occurs at CVS:

- We immediately contact all individuals affected by the event; patients, caregivers, and prescribers.
- Our pharmacists submit an incident report for individual and collective analysis.
- We investigate the incident to determine how it occurred.
- We take necessary corrective measures to prevent future occurrences; potentially including re-training of our staff, and where needed we enhance our process.

## **IMPORTANCE OF CONSUMER EDUCATION IN ENSURING QUALITY HEALTHCARE**

As we continue to strive to increase accuracy and further enhance our quality assurance program, we believe we also need to more actively engage our customers in the prescription-filling process. To that end, we hope one of the positive outcomes of your story is that our customers will understand the importance of asking their pharmacists questions about their prescriptions, including any potential side effects, precautions, and what outcome they should expect. Steps that customers should take include:

- Talk to your doctor and pharmacist about the brand and generic names of your prescription and how your medication works.
- Ask your pharmacist to clarify any questions you have about your medication, including drug strength and directions, potential side effects and how your prescription medication may interact with any over the counter products.
- Review the drug information sheet that comes with your prescription for details about proper use, activities to avoid, and what to do in case of a missed dose.

We recognize that any process involving people is not immune from the possibility of error, which is why we remain committed to continually improving quality measures to help ensure our pharmacists fill prescriptions safely and accurately.

Our 20,000 CVS pharmacists work hard every day to safely fill prescriptions, and we receive thousands of letters from customers about the positive impact our pharmacists make in their lives. We hope that your story will encourage consumers to engage with their pharmacists to ensure they are properly informed about their medication therapies.

Sincerely,

Mitch Betses, RPh  
Vice President, Pharmacy Operations  
CVS/pharmacy