COVID-19 Preparedness Update

Community pharmacy services are key to maintaining availability of critical medicines and health advice to the public. Being well prepared for COVID-19 pandemic is important and ensuring health of pharmacy staff and consumers is a high priority in such preparations.

Infection control principles in the pharmacy

> Ensure staff and customers have access to handwashing facilities and alcohol-based hand rub. Hands must be cleaned regularly – see handwashing technique here.

> Regular surface cleaning in the pharmacy is important in containing the risk of spread of COVID-19.

> Pharmacy staff can ensure that the pharmacy is hygienic by cleaning surfaces using a detergent AND disinfectant. This can be either by a 2-step cleaning/disinfecting process, or using a product that combines both steps.

> Remove product testers from displays and consider ways to discourage customers handling retail products.

> Encourage staff to sign prescriptions for certification of supply, where appropriate, to minimise patient handling of communal pens at the pharmacy counter.   Staff should carry their own pen and not share with colleagues or customers. Regularly clean communal pens.

> Ensure staff are aware of requirements for minimising the spread, and are aware of state and national guidelines regarding home isolation and quarantine.

> Further information on work attendance for health workers is available here.

Social distancing in the pharmacy

> Adopt social distancing in the pharmacy by keeping a distance of at least 1.5m when interacting with other staff and customers.

> Space out work stations in the dispensary and on DAA packing benches.

> Consider strategies to limit the number of people in the pharmacy or waiting areas, such as:

   o encouraging customers to leave their prescriptions on file, and call or email ahead of time,

   o encourage customers to wait outside the pharmacy or in the car until their prescriptions are ready,

   o consider signage at front of the pharmacy to instruct symptomatic patients not to enter the pharmacy and to call their doctor instead, and

   o home delivery of medicines; see COVID-19 Home Medicines Service.

> Further information on social distancing, including in the workplace, is available here.

Business continuity plan

> Good planning is required to ensure pharmacies are prepared and to maintain essential medicines supplies and staff health.

> Develop a plan for various possible outcomes – such as the event that some, the majority, or all pharmacy staff are required to self-isolate or are unable to come to work.

> Reallocate staff and resources to ensure preparedness activities are undertaken. Prioritise essential activities and consider non-essential activities that can be postponed, scaled back or cancelled.

> This may include consideration of delivery of professional services, such as MedsCheck, which may be considered to be of a lower priority at this time.

> Consider how prescriptions held on file in the pharmacy may be accessed if needed in the event of a closure.

> Develop a plan for facilities/customers that the pharmacy supplies dose administration aids (DAAs) to and communicate this to facilities/customers ahead of time. Consider after-hours packing, extra staff, or a short-term arrangement of non-packed medications to residential care facilities.   Prioritise packing workload, i.e. high-risk situations (opioids) and high-risk patients (community care).

> Increase use of part-time staff to full-time/overtime on short-term arrangements, and use locum pharmacists where available.

> Speak with local GPs to understand their plans and with other local pharmacists or pharmacists in your group to assist with planning.

> See the Pharmacy Guild's Emergency Management Plan Checklist – Pandemic Preparedness.

Equitable access to medicines

> Stockpiling and over-buying of medicines is recognised as a risk to the continuity of the medicine supply chain during COVID-19 pandemic.   It is important that customers are not purchasing more medicines than is clinically necessary to ensure that medicines are available to all who need them.

> To further promote equitable access to medicines for all Australians, the Australian Government has worked with Pharmacy groups to introduce limits on dispensing and sales of prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines.

Coping with COVID-19

It is understandable that during times like this, people may be feeling afraid, worried, anxious and overwhelmed regarding the impact and constantly changing advice and issues related to COVID-19. Supporting each other and our staff and families is important during this time. See the Australian Psychological Society's fact sheets for some useful strategies which can help us to cope with the stress or anxiety experienced as a result of the outbreak.

Further information

Information on COVID-19 is changing rapidly and it is important to stay well informed. See official resources for the most up-to-date, reliable information:

> SA Health

> Department of Health advice for health practitioners and the public, and resources for health professionals and the public.

> The Department of Health's National Coronavirus Helpline (ph. 1800 020 080).

For more information

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019

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