Office Memorandum

DATE: January 19, 2022

TO: Cody Wiberg, Executive Director and Board of Pharmacy Members

FROM: Michele Mattila, Pharmacy Surveyor and Complaint Coordinator

SUBJECT: Critical Staffing Concerns - Complaints Reported

This memo is written as a follow-up to the memo provided on November 29, 2021, herein attached as Appendix A. Since December 1, 2021, the Board has received a total of 27 complaints; 16 of which are related to staffing and workload at chain pharmacies including the inability to fill acute and critical medications in a timely manner, pharmacies not answering phones, and prescription transfer issues.

Based on the ongoing concerns, staff recommend that the Board notify pharmacies of the expectation to address these issues immediately by requiring the following:

- Immediate review of any requirements or policies that may inhibit safe patient care. This includes any dispensing or vaccination metrics/requirements that place unreasonable expectations on pharmacy staff (e.g., # of prescriptions or vaccines per hour). The Board is particularly concerned with pharmacy metrics and requirements that do not give pharmacists sufficient time to perform needed clinical services. While the Board recognizes business needs, patient safety should not be jeopardized for company profits.
- Provide any additional resources or protections needed to minimize any job-related stressors of pharmacy personnel to further support safe and effective healthcare outcomes for pharmacy patients.

Related Regulations:
Minn. Stats. §151.071, subd. 2 (9), which makes it grounds for discipline to engage in conduct that demonstrates a: “willful or careless disregard for the health, welfare, or safety of a patient”
Minn. Rules 6800.2250, subp. 1 K “Engaging in any pharmacy practice which constitutes a danger to the health, welfare, or safety of a patient or the public, including but not limited to, practicing in a manner which substantially departs from the standard of care ordinarily exercised by a pharmacist and which harms or could harm a patient.”
Office Memorandum

DATE:   November 29, 2021

TO:  Cody Wiberg, Executive Director and Board of Pharmacy Members

FROM:  Michele Mattila, Pharmacy Surveyor and Complaint Coordinator

SUBJECT:  Critical Staffing Concerns

This memo is written to alert you to the fact that the Board office has been receiving multiple complaints from pharmacists and members of the public concerning issues that appear to be due to inadequate staffing at chain pharmacies. Additionally, during inspections and investigations Pharmacy Surveyors are noting that staffing often appears to be grossly inadequate for the volume of work being performed by pharmacists and technicians. Below is a summary of some of the issues to which we have been alerted:

• Patients calling other pharmacies to ask questions about their prescriptions because, when they call the pharmacy that filled their prescription, they are put on hold for long periods of time and eventually just hang up.
• Pharmacists trying to transfer prescriptions from a pharmacy, who are also put on hold for as long as 90 minutes – without ever being able to get the transfer.
• Patients transferring prescriptions because they are being told it will take three days to refill a prescription.
• Reports that pharmacists are telling other pharmacists that they have been instructed to not answer their phones.
• Pharmacies with a drive thru backed up with cars and, inside, a line of patients extending halfway through the store.
• Vaccinations scheduled through the corporate software every five minutes throughout the day, even though there was only one pharmacist on duty.
• Patients waiting for multiple days to have acute and critical medications filled. Some experiencing increased illness and side effects from lack of needed therapy.

Based on the above issues, staff recommend the Board notify pharmacies of the expectation to address these issues immediately by requiring the following:

• Immediate review of any requirements or policies that may inhibit safe patient care. This includes any dispensing or vaccination metrics/requirements that place unreasonable expectations on pharmacy staff (e.g., # of prescriptions or vaccines per hour). The Board is particularly concerned with pharmacy metrics and requirements that do not give pharmacists sufficient time to perform needed clinical services. While the Board recognizes business needs, patient safety should not be jeopardized for company profits.
• Provide any additional resources or protections needed to minimize any job-related stressors of pharmacy personnel to further support safe and effective healthcare outcomes for pharmacy patients.

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