

Dedicated to
member pharmacies



A Guide for Pharmacy Staff



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Your new job

Welcome to your new job in a pharmacy. Like any job, what you get out of it depends on how much you put into it. You will find that the work offers plenty of variety, contact with people and lots of opportunities to learn.

Make the most of these opportunities and this job could be the start of an enjoyable and rewarding career. Well trained, knowledgeable pharmacy staff are always in demand.

As with any new job, you will be facing new responsibilities and learning new ways of doing things. Pharmacies are different to most other retail businesses because the staff have the important responsibility of handling medicine and providing health advice. There are lots of rules and guidelines that must be followed to protect both the public and the staff providing pharmacy services. This booklet provides an overview of what working in a pharmacy means. It has been written to help you understand your responsibilities and to teach you basic customer service and retail skills. We hope you find it useful.

Pharmacies are vital to community health care. Community pharmacists are the health professional people see most often. The friendly pharmacy is somewhere people know they will be made welcome and where they can get accurate advice from people they trust, without having to make an appointment.

First impressions count

As part of your pharmacy's team, your role is important. You are often the first person a customer or patient sees when they come into a pharmacy, so the image you project must be positive and welcoming. Your attitude and approach will go a long way towards making customers feel at ease in your pharmacy and confident about the service that will be provided.

What qualities do you think are important in a pharmacy assistant?

A personal profile of a good pharmacy assistant may read something like this:

People person – approachable, friendly, warm, caring, patient and genuinely interested in the wellbeing of others.

Good communicator – able to give and receive verbal information clearly and accurately. A good listener.

Excellent personal presentation – well-groomed, with a pleasant and polite manner.

Self motivated – keen to learn and gain new skills.

Trustworthy – punctual, responsible, reliable, loyal and honest. Able to maintain confidentiality.

Well organised – tidy work habits and able to manage work time efficiently.

Getting started

Read your pharmacy's procedures manual and standard operating procedures (SOPs) so that you are aware of all the rules and guidelines that must be followed.

Pharmacy's competitive advantage

In today's market, pharmacies are competing for business with supermarkets, department stores and even service stations. Our competitive advantage lies in providing a quality service that includes:

- › personal attention
- › accurate advice from trained, knowledgeable, professional staff
- › solutions to patients' health problems.

Other retail outlets selling some of the same products as pharmacies cannot provide the same quality service. Advice and knowledge separate us from our competitors. Well trained, professional staff ensure that all customers receive the help and advice they are looking for. It is these staff members who keep customers coming back to pharmacies.

Promoting the pharmacy image

Pharmacy premises

One of your responsibilities may be to help keep the retail section of the pharmacy clean and tidy. This is important because customers must feel confident about the standard of service they can expect from your pharmacy. A pharmacy that is clean and tidy with stock arranged in an orderly manner promotes a professional image, and customers feel reassured about the quality of service provided.

Pharmacy staff

Pharmacies are in the business of promoting wellness and good health. Customers are more likely to ask for advice on health matters from someone who looks as though they follow that advice themselves.

How can you project a positive healthy image?

- › Exercise regularly, eat a balanced diet, don't smoke.
- › Learn ways to cope with stress.
- › Keep your personal and professional life separate.
- › Maintain high standards of personal hygiene and grooming.
- › Build your knowledge base and your confidence will grow as a result.
- › Always try to keep your sense of humour.

Get advice

Senior staff at your pharmacy will have lots of knowledge and advice on how to lead a healthy lifestyle. Get them to give you a few main points to think about when you're talking to customers.



Personal presentation

First impressions are important, so the image you present must be smart and professional.

Appearance

Your appearance is the first thing a customer sees when he or she comes into the pharmacy.

This means careful makeup, manicured hands, clean, well-groomed hair, good body hygiene and a clean, tidy uniform and shoes.

Some things that are acceptable in a social setting are not generally acceptable when you are working in a pharmacy. It pays to check what the policies in your pharmacy are first if you are thinking of changing your appearance in a dramatic way.

Chewing gum while you work is not a good look either, especially if you continue to chew while talking to customers.

Body language

Body language is the unspoken way we unconsciously communicate what is on our minds. Research shows that over half of human communication takes place through body language.

Your posture and facial expression say a lot about your attitude and how you are feeling. A pharmacy assistant slouching over the counter projects a negative image. Potential customers may hesitate to approach someone who looks tired and bored. If your body language communicates enthusiasm and readiness to help, people will want to approach you and will tend to have confidence in you.



Service with a smile

Smiling is perhaps one of the most powerful forms of body language. We all enjoy being smiled at. A smile demonstrates confidence, friendliness, a positive attitude and a good mood. It immediately puts other people at ease and makes them feel accepted. Remember too that the reason many people visit the pharmacy is because they need help. They may be feeling depressed, unwell or in pain, so being greeted with a smile can brighten someone's day when things aren't going so well.



Team work

Teams are everywhere in our community – rugby, netball, and debating just to name a few. They're also found in most workplaces. So what is so special about teams? And what can you do to make your team run efficiently?

A team is usually stronger than the individuals in it. When people work as a team, each person's special strengths help the whole team and any weaknesses are less obvious. A workplace without a good team can be a lonely and insecure place and often the workload falls unevenly on just one or two people.

Members of a strong team in a pharmacy:

- › support and help each other
- › recognise strengths and encourage talent in each other
- › are friendly and interested in others but respect each other's privacy
- › keep each other informed about promotions/specials/new products
- › share the workload
- › share knowledge and skills.

The great thing about working in a strong team is that you feel valued. A special bond between team members develops and this creates a pleasant and friendly working atmosphere. Customers sense it too.

What does everyone in the pharmacy team do?

Pharmacists are responsible for dispensing medicine and advising people on how and when to take their medicine for best effect. Pharmacists have the overall responsibility for everything that goes on in the pharmacy, including supervision of pharmacy technicians, assistants and interns. They are often responsible for running the business as well, although in large pharmacies there may be a business manager.

Pharmacy technicians assist pharmacists with the preparation and dispensing of medicine and the processing of prescriptions and patient records. Many technicians also sell and advise on over-the-counter medicine.

Pharmacy assistants are involved mainly in the retail side of the pharmacy, selling and advising on health and beauty-related products.

Pharmacy interns are graduates from the schools of pharmacy who must complete a 52-week practical training programme in either a hospital or community pharmacy. Sometimes interns are overseas-trained pharmacists who are working under the supervision of a New Zealand-registered pharmacist for a time, before they can register as a pharmacist here.

Plan a social event

See whether the staff in your pharmacy would be interested in taking part in a social event. This could be tied in with Christmas, or another annual celebration, or it could be more regular. Something as simple as bowling can help you learn more about each other outside of the pharmacy and will help you interact as a team when in the pharmacy.



Legal, ethical and policy matters

There are a large number of regulations that apply to the way pharmacies operate and the way patients are treated. Their purpose is to make sure that the advice and services people receive are safe, fair and of a consistently high standard.

In addition, pharmacists are bound by the Pharmacy Council of New Zealand's Code of Ethics. Ethics are moral principles and the Code of Ethics is based on 10 principles that guide pharmacists in the standards of practice expected of them.

The pharmacist has overall responsibility for everything that goes on in the pharmacy and can be held accountable for your actions as well as their own actions. It is essential that you take great care with all aspects of your work and that you understand the limits of what you are allowed to do. For most of the activities within a pharmacy, for example selling medicines, cleaning, or dealing with incoming stock, there are set procedures to follow. Learn the procedures that apply to your work and always ask the pharmacist or other senior staff member if you are unsure about anything.

Customers' rights

The Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights applies to all health services and disability support services in New Zealand. Pharmacies provide health services and the code is relevant to the work we do. The code gives rights to users of health services and places obligations on people providing health services.

Consumers' have the right to:

- › be treated with respect
- › freedom from discrimination, coercion, harassment and exploitation
- › dignity and independence
- › the appropriate standards of service
- › effective communication

- › be fully informed
- › make an informed choice and give informed consent
- › have a support person
- › teaching and research
- › make a complaint and expect a fair, simple and speedy resolution.

To summarise, the code requires that you respect your patients' privacy and take into account the needs, values and beliefs of different cultural, religious, social and ethnic groups. All services must be provided with reasonable care and skill in a way that complies with legal, professional and ethical standards.

In addition, you must communicate with the patient in a way that they can understand. If the patient is not happy with the service provided, they can complain to the Health and Disability Commissioner who may decide to conduct an investigation. The Health and Disability Commissioner takes all complaints seriously and is responsible for taking steps to resolve the complaint in a fair, simple, speedy and efficient way.

Customer privacy

Pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and pharmacy assistants are in a special position of trust. People visit pharmacies for a number of reasons. It may be to get a prescription dispensed, buy over-the-counter medicine or ask advice on a health matter. Sometimes the health matters are sensitive and asking for help can be embarrassing for the patient. Whatever the reason, everyone has a right to have their privacy respected and for information about their health issues and treatment to be kept confidential.

How can you protect a patient's privacy?

Respect for privacy means making sure that you take all reasonable steps to protect a patient's personal information. This may mean moving a patient to a more private area in the pharmacy or lowering your voice so that other patients cannot overhear you talking to someone about private health matters. It also means keeping all information about a patient, their health problems or their medicine confidential and only discussing these things with other staff members directly concerned with the care of that patient.

Respecting people's privacy and keeping any information about them confidential is of the utmost importance. If you breach someone's right to privacy they can lay a complaint against the pharmacy with the Privacy Commissioner. This is a serious matter that could result in the pharmacist being fined or disciplined in some way, not to mention the effect the bad publicity could have on the pharmacy.

Selling medicine

In your role as a pharmacy assistant, it is likely that you will have the important responsibility of being able to sell certain medicine. Medicine and other products sold in pharmacies are special – they are not like the merchandise sold in other shops. The wrong recommendation in a clothing store or bookshop will be annoying, inconvenient and may waste the customer's money, but recommending

the wrong medicine, vitamin supplement or herbal product could have serious consequences. At best, the patient's health problem will not improve. At worst, a serious adverse effect may be triggered such as an asthma attack, a rise in blood pressure or a severe allergic reaction.

It is very important that you ask the pharmacist for help with anything you are not sure about.

Never risk selling a product that might be inappropriate or unsafe for the patient.

When selling medicines ask the WWHAMM questions

- › **W**ho is the medicine for? (the patient or someone else?)
- › **W**hat are the symptoms?
- › **H**ow long have the symptoms continued?
- › What **A**ction has already been taken? (medicine taken or other treatment)
- › Is the person taking any other **M**edication?
- › Does the person have any **M**edical conditions? (eg, diabetes, asthma)

Always refer to the pharmacist if:

- › A pharmacist-only medicine is requested; or a pharmacist-only medicine could be a suitable treatment for the symptoms described by the patient.
- › Symptoms relate to the ears, eyes or genito-urinary system, or if there is chest pain.
- › The patient is pregnant, breastfeeding, elderly or a young child.
- › The symptoms described to you have been present for some time or if they seem unusual. For example, if someone had the usual symptoms of a cold (runny nose, sore throat, cough) but had a skin rash as well, you should refer the patient to the pharmacist. A skin rash is not a normal cold symptom and could indicate a more serious condition.
- › The patient is already taking other medicine, has already tried other products for the same complaint unsuccessfully, or has an on going medical condition, for example diabetes or high blood pressure.
- › If you are at all unsure.

Classes of medicine

Medicines are categorised according to their relative safety when being used, and their need for supervision when being sold. Those needing greatest supervision are prescription medicines and those needing least supervision and control are general sales medicines.

The three classes of medicines that can be sold in a pharmacy are:

Pharmacist-only medicine can only be sold from a pharmacy and a pharmacist must be personally involved in the sale. Mersyndol, for pain, and treatments for vaginal thrush are examples of pharmacist-only medicines.

Pharmacy-only medicine can only be sold from a pharmacy but by any member of the staff on the understanding that the pharmacist can see and hear the sale being made and so can help with the sale if necessary. Antihistamines (the non-sedating ones) for hayfever are examples of pharmacy-only medicines.

General sales medicine can be sold from any retail outlet such as supermarkets or service stations as well as pharmacies. Examples include aspirin and some throat lozenges.

Abuse of over-the-counter (OTC) medicines

Some OTC (do not need a prescription) medicines have the potential to be misused or abused and for some people to become dependent on them. Medicines commonly misused or abused include those containing codeine and some antihistamines. Excessive use of laxatives is considered misuse if they are being taken by someone with an eating disorder.

While it is important to keep a supply of these medicines for legitimate users, pharmacists and their staff have an obligation to control sales of such medicines to ensure they do not find their way to a misuser. The pharmacist will tell you which medicines are likely to be misused and guide you on how to deal with customers you suspect of misusing OTC medicines. If you are ever unsure about selling an OTC medicine, always refer to the pharmacist.

Prescriptions

Prescription medicines can be prescribed by doctors, dentists, midwives and other nurses with the necessary qualifications for patients under their care, and by vets for animals under their care. Dispensing prescriptions is a large part of pharmacy business. The only staff members legally allowed to take part in the dispensing process are pharmacists, pharmacy interns and pharmacy technicians. The pharmacist must check all medicine dispensed by pharmacy interns and pharmacy technicians before they are given to the patient.

Health and safety

Your employer is responsible for making sure that your work environment is safe and that exposure to risks and hazards is minimised. You are also responsible for taking reasonable steps to protect your own safety and to make sure that you do not harm anyone else through your actions. Besides hazards such as earthquakes, floods and fire that can be a threat wherever you are, there are hazards more particular to pharmacy. These include things like:

- › poisons, toxic and flammable substances
- › armed hold-ups
- › broken glass
- › exposure to infectious diseases
- › handling waste or spilled medicines.

Your employer will have written procedures you must follow in the case of potentially dangerous situations, such as a spill involving a poison or flammable substance, in an emergency such as fire, or if a situation such as an armed hold-up occurs. Make sure you know what the procedures are. The Guild produces guides for what to do in these types of circumstances, and they can be found on the Guild's website.

Practice WWHAMM

Make sure you know your WWHAMM questions by practising on other staff members or on your friends and family. Always refer to a pharmacist if in doubt, or if the patient fits any of the listed criteria.



Customer service

It costs at least five times as much to attract a new customer as it does to keep an existing customer, so we want to keep our customers coming back. The secret to doing this lies in great customer service.

By providing great customer service, you will ensure that your pharmacy is the place where people prefer to shop. To provide great customer service you first need to understand what sort of service customers expect from a pharmacy.

Customer expectations are influenced by:

- › **Word of mouth** – A satisfied customer can be your best source of advertising. They will tell others who in turn will be encouraged to shop at your pharmacy. On the other hand, a customer who has a bad experience will, on average, tell 11 other people. If the experience was particularly bad, those 11 people will each tell another five. Often the story is exaggerated each time it's told. That's 67 people who will all believe that your pharmacy treats customers badly or employs incompetent staff. That kind of advertising can ruin a pharmacy's reputation, particularly in smaller communities.
- › **Previous experience** – The service your pharmacy has provided in the past (both good and bad) will influence what your customer expects next time they come in.
- › **Other pharmacies and competitors** – Your pharmacy will always be compared with your customers' experiences at other pharmacies and retail outlets.

Today, our pharmacy customers expect more than just efficient and competent service. Experts in customer service often talk about the "shopping experience". The experience starts the moment the customer walks in the door and all aspects of the pharmacy environment and the service provided create that experience. As with any other experience, if it is pleasant or enjoyable, they generally want to do it again.

Customer service excellence

One of the things you can do to lift your customer service into a league of its own is to offer extra help, sometimes described as "going the extra mile".

Simple ways you might offer extra help could be:

- › offering a glass of water to a customer purchasing analgesics for a headache so they can take a dose straight away
- › offering to hold a baby while the parent uses the Eftpos machine
- › offering to carry a heavy or bulky purchase out to the car
- › offering to try and obtain a product that is out of stock or not usually stocked by your pharmacy then ringing your customer when it arrives
- › contacting customers to let them know when their favourite fragrance/cosmetic product is on special
- › inviting a customer to return and give you feedback on a product you have sold to them.

Customers:

- › *Are the most important people who come through the door.*
- › *Are individuals with feelings, needs, and names.*
- › *Are the reason for our work and our jobs.*



Effective customer interactions

Effective listening is an active rather than a passive activity. It involves more than just listening to what the customer is saying. You need to be aware of what the customer's body language is telling you and to listen to the message behind the words.

Tips for being a good listener:

- › Move your customer to a quiet area of the pharmacy away from other customers.
- › Give the customer your full attention.
- › Maintain eye contact throughout the discussion. Take cues from the customer as to how much eye contact they are comfortable with.
- › Display positive body language. This means keeping your arms loose (not folded) and leaning slightly towards the customer.
- › Watch your customer's body language for clues about how they are feeling.
- › Signal that you are following what is being said by nodding or occasionally using an agreeing word such as "yes", "okay", or "uh-huh". This signals to the customer that you are still listening and encourages them to keep talking.
- › Listen right to the end. Do not interrupt or jump to conclusions.
- › Ask questions to get more information if you are not sure that you understand what the customer has said.
- › Reflect back what your customer has told you. This means, summarise the main points and repeat them in your own words. You can say something like "so what you are saying is ..." or "let me check that I've understood you properly". This way you'll know if you're on the right track because your customer will correct you if you have misunderstood. It will also give you a few moments to think about your reply.



Tips for being a good communicator:

- › Keep it simple.
- › Take time to organise your own thoughts so that what you say is logical and clear.
- › Use language the customer will understand. For example, if you don't think the customer will know what an analgesic is, say pain reliever instead.
- › Use a pleasant tone of voice, varying the pitch and volume to suit the customer and the situation.
- › Give the customer your undivided attention and ignore distractions.

Never make assumptions about the customer before you have spoken to them. Start each customer interaction with an open mind.



Health literacy

Health literacy is a prominent feature of health care in New Zealand and means “the degree to which individuals can obtain, process and understand health information and services they need to make appropriate health decisions.”

Patients with poor health literacy are less likely to know about their medical conditions, treatments and medicine, and are more likely to end up in hospital. Any type of patient can have low health literacy, so never make an assumption based on age or other factors such as income.

To improve patients’ understanding, it’s important that they know what their medicines are, why they need them, and when they need to take them.

Questions you could ask a patient:

- › Tell me what your doctor has told you about this medicine?
- › Tell me why you are taking this medicine? What do you understand its purpose to be?
- › Does the medicine seem to be working for you?
- › Tell me about the system you use to remember to take your medicine?
- › Most people have a lot of questions, what questions do you have?
- › I’ve just given you lots of information, to make sure I haven’t missed anything; can you describe to me what you need to do?
- › Can you remember the main side-effects you need to watch for?

Exceptional customer service

Take a minute to think about an occasion when you have received exceptional customer service. What was it about the service that made you think it was exceptional? Watch the experienced staff in your pharmacy and learn from the way they provide exceptional customer service.



Selling

Selling is part of every day life while working in a pharmacy. Developing good sales skills can enhance your job satisfaction, keep your employer happy and ensure that your customers get the products that they need.

The six steps to successful selling:

- › approach and greet your customer
- › identify their needs
- › demonstrate the product
- › answer questions
- › close the sale
- › follow through.

Let's look at each step in more detail.

1. Approach and greet

The approach you use with a customer is important. Although it takes only a few seconds, the approach sets the tone and mood for the sale. The approach is the moment you gain the customer's attention. Effective sales people vary the approach according to the situation and circumstances. There is no single approach that is appropriate for all situations.

When the customer walks in:

- › give them time to adjust to the surroundings – don't pounce
- › discreetly observe them and decide on the most appropriate approach for that customer
- › time your approach carefully.

A warm smile will often get the sale started because your smile identifies you as being friendly. This puts your customer at ease and makes them feel welcome.

The one question you should never ask is "may I help you?" The reply is very often "no thanks, I'm just looking". This reply shuts down communication. You move away and no sale is made.

Effective approaches include the:

Greeting approach – You use this approach when you greet your customer with "good morning", "hello, how are you today?" or "hi". If you know the customer's name you can add it to your greeting. This lets your customer know that they are important enough to be remembered. This approach is very successful if you make your greeting, let the customer respond, then wait for them to start the discussion.

Friendly approach – Some people have a naturally friendly nature and find it as easy to chat to strangers as to people they know. With this approach, the pharmacy assistant starts up a conversation about the weather or something else that is easy to chat about. Although the friendliness of this approach usually makes the customer feel at ease and welcome, it can be time consuming as it can take a while for the customer to get around to saying why they came into the pharmacy.

Merchandise approach – This approach works well when the customer is showing interest in a particular product. You approach with a comment related to the product. For example, if a customer is looking at a display of sunscreens you could either make a statement about how the product will benefit the customer like: "these sunscreens are water resistant so they provide good protection even while you're swimming." Or, you could ask an open question relating to the customer's need like: "are you looking for a sunscreen for your own use or for someone else?"

2. Identify your customer's needs

Before you can recommend a product or give advice, you need to determine exactly what your customer's needs are. In other words, what result does your customer want? This requires careful questioning and attentive listening. Sometimes you need to probe, but in a tactful way.

Even when a customer expresses his or her need immediately, for example: "I want to buy some wound dressings", you need more information. You need to establish what type of wound the dressings are for – whether it's a burn, a cut, a graze, where on the body the wound is, and if there are any special requirements such as a waterproof dressing or one for sensitive skin.

The most effective probing questions are OPEN questions. Open questions draw out information and begin with "who", "what", "where", "when", "why", "how" or "tell me about". Open questions can't be answered with a "yes" or "no".

For example:

- › Who are the dressings for – yourself or someone else?
- › What type of wound is it?
- › Where is the wound?

Encourage your customer to talk freely to reveal information that can help you discover his or her needs.

Note: Sometimes the questions you need to ask will be of a personal nature or you may need to ask a number of questions to work out how best to help your customer. It reassures the customer if you explain why you need to ask questions. For example, you could say "I need to know more about how and where the dressings are to be used before I can recommend the best type of dressing for you. So I'll need to ask some questions first."

3. Demonstrate the product

By demonstrating the product you show your customer how the product will meet his or her needs.

When you demonstrate a product, get the customer involved. Let them observe, hold, operate, apply, use, or smell the product where appropriate.

Talk about the product's features and benefits.

A feature only describes a product, for example:

- › a folding hair brush
- › a non-sedating antihistamine
- › a waterproof mascara.

A benefit describes what the feature will do for the customer. For example:

- › this hairbrush folds up so it will fit into your handbag easily
- › this is a non-sedating antihistamine, which means that it won't make you drowsy or affect your ability to drive
- › because this is waterproof mascara, you can wear it while swimming and it won't smudge.

Knowledge of product benefits can make a huge difference to your selling skills. Benefits convert features into reasons to buy the product and this is what most customers are looking for.

Features and benefits

As an exercise, list the features of some of the products you sell and think of how you can express these features as benefits.



4. Answer questions

This is a transition phase between the demonstration and the close of the sale. You can answer any questions your customer has and, if they have any objections, go back to the demonstration and show that the product has benefits that overcome the objection.

For example:

Customer: "The lipstick sounds great, but it costs more than I wanted to pay."

Assistant: "Yes this lipstick does cost a little more but because it is long lasting, you will find you won't reapply it as often as other products. This lipstick is more economical in the long run."

5. Close the sale

After demonstrating the products and answering any questions, you then need to help your customer make a decision. There are various ways to do this. Usually the customer will signal that they are ready to buy either verbally, for example: "does it come with a guarantee?" or non-verbally, through actions such as putting tops back on products or nodding, smiling and picking up the product.

Vary your closing approach to suit the particular sale. Here are a few examples:

- › Would you like to take the shampoo or conditioner, or both?
- › Can I gift-wrap these for you?
- › Which colour would you like to take?
- › How would you like to pay for this?

If you wanted to suggest a companion product, this is the time to do it.

6. Follow through

Customers like to feel they have made the right decision, so you should make a comment endorsing the product they are purchasing. That way, customers will leave the pharmacy feeling good about their purchase and the pharmacy. For example you could say: "this is a lovely fragrance. I'm sure you're going to enjoy wearing it".

Another good idea is to invite the customer to return and let you know how they are getting on with the product. Your customer will be impressed by your genuine interest and you will get a chance to improve your product knowledge.

Finally, it is important to remember not to show disappointment or displeasure if no sale is made. Your customer may have reasons for not buying. However, if you have impressed them with your excellent product knowledge and friendly confident manner, then it is likely that they will come back and purchase the product at a later date.



Add-on-sales

Sometimes called companion sales, an add-on sale means selling another product that is related to the product the customer is currently purchasing.

Most customers appreciate being reminded of other products they may need, shown products on special and introduced to new products. Before you can successfully introduce companion products related to the purchase, you need to have a good knowledge of the merchandise carried in your pharmacy.

Tips on making add-on sales:

- › Wait until the first sale is about to be made before introducing a related product, or you may lose both sales.
- › Never pressure your customer. By trying to force a sale you may lose the customer.
- › When thinking about possible add-on sales, consider products that are natural partners, products on special and new products.

Some products are obvious add-ons. For example, a medicine measure with liquid medicine, shampoo and conditioner, baby wipes with disposable nappies. It can be very easy.

You can initiate add-on sales by simply asking questions such as: “have you considered using a lip pencil with your lipstick?” or “do you need any tissues?” when you’re selling decongestant tablets for a cold or flu.

Think in terms of complementary sales all the time. When a customer decides to buy some nail polish you are simply offering an extra service by asking, “are you running low on nail polish remover because we have some on special this week?” It can be difficult at first to suggest another product to your customer but once you’ve gained confidence and made a few successful extra sales this way, it will become second nature.

Add-On Sales

Think about ideas for add-on sales. Talk with other staff members and see just how many related products you can come up with. This is a useful way to improve your product knowledge.



Product knowledge

Product knowledge is the key to selling. It provides the technical foundation to your selling approach and gives you the confidence to match specific products to your customer's needs.

One of the main reasons customers shop in a pharmacy is because they believe that pharmacy staff can give them the correct information and advice about the products they require. In their eyes, you are the expert and product knowledge makes you the expert.

You must know where each product is kept in the pharmacy (including items on display and reserve stock). When a customer is in a hurry, it can be very annoying to be kept waiting while the assistant is trying to find the product requested. Know which brands are stocked and which products can be ordered in on request. Keep up-to-date with items being advertised, either nationally, locally, or just by your pharmacy, as these are likely to be in demand.

What you need to know

When learning about each product, ask the following questions:

- › What is it used for?
- › How is it used?
- › How does it work?
- › What sizes does it come in and what is the price of each size?
- › What are the special features of this product?
- › If it is out of stock, what is an alternative?
- › Is it a pharmacy-only product?
- › Is this product safe for general use or should certain people avoid using it?

- › Are there any special instructions on using this product that I should tell the customer?
- › Are there any special precautions about the use of this product that I should tell the customer?
- › How should the product be cared for? Are there any special instructions for how it should be stored or cleaned?
- › What add-on products could I suggest?

Ten sources of product knowledge

Your pharmacist and senior pharmacy staff are valuable sources of information. Listen to the pharmacist and other senior staff giving advice to customers. If you are unsure of a product, always ask for help. Customers will trust you if you have the confidence to admit a gap in your knowledge.

Product packaging

Read the product packaging when you are tidying shelves or putting stock away.

Manufacturer's representatives are a good source of information. They can answer your questions, provide written information and in many cases, provide in-store training. Some companies have training videos that you can borrow or potentially watch online.

Conferences, training seminars, workshops

If you get the chance, make an effort to attend relevant conferences, seminars and workshops. Get in touch with the Guild to see what training courses and conferences are available in your area.

National training course

Level 4 – NZ Certificate in Pharmacy (Community Pharmacy Assistant)

The National Certificate in Pharmacy provides a training pathway that can be delivered full-time with pharmacy work experience, or part-time if you are employed in a pharmacy already.

Training course offered by pharmaceutical companies and other product manufacturers

There are a range of other courses offered by distance learning, either as workshops or one-on-one learning, covering topics such as wound care, contact lens care and hair care. Ask individual representatives about any courses their company offers.

Advertising

Television, radio and magazine advertising can be useful sources of information. New products in particular are often promoted via the media. The internet is also worth checking out as many companies promote their products online.

Journals, industry publications, leaflets, reference books

The Guild's *T&A Topics* is a bi-monthly magazine covering a range of topics. It is specifically written for pharmacy assistants and technicians. The monthly news publication, *Pharmacy Today*, has a pharmacy assistants and technicians section.

Personal use

Where possible, try to use some products yourself. Customers often ask, "what do you use?" or "have you tried this yourself?" Personal experience with a product gives you first-hand knowledge of its benefits, and speaking from experience is always easier than guessing or relying on what someone else has told you.

Customers

Product knowledge can be gained from customers' comments and experiences with products. Most are happy to tell you how well a product worked for them.

Start your own product knowledge folder

Collect product information and file it in a folder according to product use categories. This will be useful for future reference and for building your own knowledge.



Telephone, email and social media advice

Your manner on the telephone and over email is important. These tips will help you handle interactions efficiently and courteously.

Taking calls

- › Answer promptly (within two to three rings, if possible).
- › The owner probably has a standard greeting he or she likes staff to use, like “Good morning/afternoon, High Street Pharmacy, Sue speaking.”
- › Smile so your voice sounds friendly. Speak clearly and at an acceptable volume so you can be heard and understood.
- › Give the caller your undivided attention. Don’t try and do other things while you are taking the call.
- › Do not interrupt the caller. Demonstrate that you are listening by saying things like “yes”, “really”, or “I understand” then wait for a natural break before you respond fully.
- › Personalise the conversation – include the caller’s name when you respond.
- › Be careful not to speak too fast. It makes the caller think you are in a hurry to get them off the phone.
- › Repeat back any information such as instructions, phone numbers or names to make sure that you have remembered them correctly.
- › When you have to pass the customer on to someone else, pass on information like the customer’s name and any facts you have obtained so they don’t have to repeat the information again.

Take a message

If you need to take a message, use a response like this: “Mr Brown isn’t available right now but if you give me your name and number I’ll ask him to call you as soon as possible.”

Always write down the message, including the time of the call, the person’s name and number, what the message is and your initials. Pass on the message as soon as possible.

Email etiquette

Your email etiquette can tell a customer or patient a lot about your pharmacy so you need to make sure it is professional, efficient and protects you against potential liability later on.

1. Professional – by using proper language, grammar and spelling in your emails, your pharmacy comes across as having a professional image.

2. Efficient – try to respond promptly to emails and get to the point quickly. Succinct emails are much more effective than poorly-worded or overly long emails.

3. Protection from liability – being aware of the risks involved in writing inappropriate emails will protect your pharmacy from potential future legal issues.



Some other general tips to bear in mind with emails: make sure you include the original message thread so the recipient knows what your email refers to, don't attach unnecessary files, make sure you have a good virus scanner operating, don't be tempted to write in capitals for emphasis – it will just look as though you are shouting, don't use abbreviations unless you are sure the recipient knows what they mean, don't discuss confidential information and lastly, always re-read your emails before you press send to check any spelling or other mistakes.

Email templates

Think about setting up some standard email templates to use for replies to customer queries and requests, this will save you time and also mean anyone can use the template and be sure that they're abiding by the pharmacy's email etiquette.

Social media advice

Social media is more and more prevalent and many pharmacies have their own Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. One of your responsibilities might be to manage these sites on behalf of the pharmacy. It's vital that you remain as professional as possible when using social media, and abide by all of your pharmacy's rules about engaging with customers, as if they were with you in the pharmacy. The email etiquette tips are a good place to start when you are using social media to communicate with people, but there are some more specific tips that will help you engage in social media effectively and safely.

One of the main things to remember about posting on social media sites is that it is permanent. There is very little chance of being able to totally erase something you say, upload or share on a social media site.

- › Don't post potentially embarrassing or offensive content.
- › Don't post photos of anyone at the pharmacy unless they have given you permission, and make sure any photos show professionalism.
- › Upload status updates that are positive and engaging, not negative or offensive – they can be a good way to promote your pharmacy.
- › Engage with your pharmacy's followers or sharers, be interactive, share interesting content and be conscious of how others may judge what you post online.
- › Google the pharmacy from time to time – knowing what's on the internet when people look for the pharmacy is very important.

The Guild's 'Your community pharmacist' Facebook page aims to promote the role of community pharmacists and community pharmacies to patients and communities. Information is posted regularly about the services provided by community pharmacy, links to useful information for patients, and links to our online pharmacy directory – *PharmacyPlace*. If your pharmacy has a Facebook page, make sure you're following our 'Your community pharmacist' page for content and information you can share on your own page.



Coping with angry customers

Nobody likes dealing with angry customers. However, it can be satisfying to handle such a situation without losing your cool.

Many customers simply want an apology and to have the matter put right. If you follow these suggested steps it is likely that you will be able to diffuse the situation successfully.

Step 1

Remain calm – Under no circumstances get angry yourself. Keep your voice controlled.

Step 2

Let them blow off steam – Listen to everything the customer has to say without interrupting. Maintain eye contact, and show that you are listening. Wait until the customer has finished completely before you respond.

Step 3

Empathise with the customer. Acknowledging the customer's feelings helps to diffuse the situation.

Say something like, "I am really sorry to hear that. I can understand your frustration." Once you have dealt with the feelings you can begin to solve the problem.

Step 4

Clarify the problem – Ask questions to find out the exact details. Don't raise your voice.

Step 5

Take action – Ask the customer what they would like you to do. Suggest alternatives and offer a solution. Agree on the best solution. Be guided by your pharmacy's policies and procedures here and refer to the pharmacist or other senior staff member if necessary. If you have made a mistake, admit to it and apologise.

Step 6

Follow up in the pharmacy to find out what went wrong and investigate ways to prevent a recurrence. If appropriate, follow up with the customer to let them know what action has been taken to prevent the problem happening again.

If you can handle an angry customer pleasantly, politely and professionally, according to your pharmacy's policies and procedures, you will find that in most cases, that person will continue to be a customer.

Angry customer role play

Practice your technique for dealing with angry customers by role playing with other staff members. Have someone act as an angry customer while you practice working through the steps. Write the steps onto a card and refer to them during your role playing until you can remember them.



Handling complaints

The way complaints are handled in a pharmacy is important. This will ensure that customers are loyal to your pharmacy.



When a customer is not satisfied with a product or service, we want them to tell us about it so we can correct the situation in the future. Pharmacies are required to have a process in place for continuously improving the quality of service they offer.

Reviewing complaints and then changing the way things are done as a result is one of the ways this can be achieved.

Customers should feel comfortable about coming to you with a complaint and pharmacy staff should view complaints as valuable feedback.

A customer who feels that their complaint has not been taken seriously can cause serious damage to your pharmacy's reputation.

Your pharmacy will have a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in place for handling complaints. This will tell you:

- › who has the authority to handle complaints.
In many pharmacies, complaints are referred immediately to the pharmacist or a senior staff member
- › what the procedure is for handling complaints
- › what records of the complaint must be kept.

When a customer comes to you with a complaint, show concern and a willingness to help. Thank the customer for bringing the matter to your attention, say that you are sorry that a problem has occurred and refer them to the appropriate person in your pharmacy.



Notes

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PHARMACY GUILD
OF NEW ZEALAND

Pharmacy House, Level 3, 124 Dixon Street, Wellington 6011
PO Box 27 139, Marion Square, Wellington 6141

Phone: 04 802 8200

Fax: 04 384 8085

Email: enquiries@pgnz.org.nz

Website: www.pgnz.org.nz