

Tip #6: Managing Medication Samples

The Risk: Medication samples are widely used in a physician's office practice. A standard process should be in place for the proper handling, storage, dispensing, and disposal of medication samples. The safe management of medication samples can help prevent medication errors and subsequent patient injuries.

Recommendations:

1. Develop policies and procedures for storing, handling, dispensing, and disposing of medication samples in your office practice.
2. Store medication samples in a safe and secure location in your office to reduce the risk of theft and unauthorized use. Limit access to medication samples to licensed staff members. These samples must not be kept in examination rooms or areas that are easily accessible to patients and visitors (e.g., in unlocked drawers or on countertops). Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for storage of each drug.
3. Maintain a log of your supply of medication samples. The log should include documentation of the monitoring of expiration dates.
4. Assign the responsibility for monitoring and tracking the inventory of medication samples to a licensed staff member.
5. Explain the proper use of the medication to patients. Include any special instructions or warnings in that discussion and document same in the patient's medical record.
6. The sample medications should be labeled according to the provider's order with the same labeling requirements as a pharmacy. According to New York State Education Law §6807(1)(b), the label should include:
 - Name of the patient
 - Name of drug
 - Dosage
 - Name of practitioner prescribing medication
 - How often to take medication
 - How much medication was prescribed (number of pills)
 - Special instructions on how to take the medication (e.g., with meals, etc.)
7. Properly dispose of expired medication samples in accordance with state, federal, and local laws.