

Five Don't-Miss Opportunities to Improve Your Pharmacy's Efficiency

Words of Advice from Six Sigma Master Blackbelt, Philip Doll

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business of pharmacySM

1. Measure. If you don't measure a process, how will you know if you are improving? Start by identifying and defining what you want to measure. Establishing a good performance baseline will help you determine the impact of future improvements. Once metrics are in place, hold associates accountable for performance. Many pharmacies measure accuracy, but why not productivity? Measuring scripts per hour can be the start of recognizing best practices. Also, metrics help your staff act on fact and eliminate making decisions based on poor information or personal bias.

2. Inventory. Having too much or too little is a problem. Too much ties up working capital and valuable shelf space, while too little causes stock-outs and customer complaints. Utilize perpetual-inventory systems or create manual reorder points. Identify your fastest-moving items and check reorder points daily. Generally less safety stock is needed for high-volume items that are being ordered daily. Slower-moving items can be checked less frequently, but should have more safety stock on hand.

3. Motion. Think small. How many steps do your pharmacists and technicians walk each day in your pharmacy? Try moving the work closer to the worker. Just because you have space doesn't mean you need to spread the work around. Consider mapping the travel of a technician filling a script. Do they have to leave their workstation to complete the order? Does the pharmacist/technician have all of the necessary tools in their workstation to complete the task? By bringing the work closer to the worker you can eliminate wasteful travel time and improve productivity, while also improving employee satisfaction.

4. "Automate." Many companies have designed outstanding technologies to aid in the order-fulfillment process. While efficient and fast, they often come with a price tag. No money for a robot? Consider replicating what automation does manually by creating high-volume pick stations that enable technicians to rapidly fill scripts without having to leave their workstation. Place the fastest-moving drugs near the worker to reduce travel time and motion.

5. Brainpower. Your staff can be the best source for new ideas and suggestions. Invite members of your pharmacy staff to step back and observe the process. Do they see bottle-necks, unnecessary travel or issues causing delays in the process? Have them record their observations and report findings to the team. Have staff brainstorm ideas on how to reduce steps, eliminate bottlenecks and improve the order flow.

Ready to learn more about improving your pharmacy's efficiency?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Philip Doll is the Director of Business Process, Six Sigma, for McKesson Pharmaceutical. He has operational and financial responsibility for process-improvement projects for McKesson's distribution network. Philip has more than 25 years of experience in supply-chain logistics. For the past nine years he has been a Six Sigma Master Blackbelt, trained over 100 Blackbelts and over 350 Greenbelts in Lean and Six Sigma methodologies, and managed a portfolio of over 300 projects. He has published numerous articles, is active in industry forums and advisory boards, and is a frequent presenter at Six Sigma conferences.