
Working With Pharmacists in Psychiatry

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Introduction

Pharmacists in psychiatric settings play a crucial role in managing medication safety and efficacy as well as helping to promote adherence. They collaborate closely with the medical team to ensure optimal pharmacological care for patients.

Training

Most pharmacists hold a Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) degree, typically earned after four years of post-college education. Some pharmacists enter the field through six-year programs that begin after high school. Additionally, pharmacists can pursue specialization as Board Certified Psychiatric Pharmacists (BCPP) through a variety of pathways, culminating in a board certification examination.

Duties

- Managing the in-hospital pharmacy, including creating formularies, helping to develop clinical guidelines, purchasing medications, and dispensing medications as they are ordered on the units.
- Reviewing medication orders.
- In some settings, clinical psychiatric pharmacists participate in patient rounds and act as psychopharmacological consultants. They may provide medication related education to medical, nursing and other professional staff and conduct medication education groups for patients.

A Day in the Life of an Inpatient Psych Pharmacist

Daily tasks include reviewing medication orders, clarifying unclear orders, and discussing potential issues with physicians. They often intervene with recommendations that are clinically significant to avoid adverse effects.

Common Issues and Interactions

Pharmacists frequently need to clarify orders when there are discrepancies in dosages or potential drug interactions that could be harmful. The interactions they highlight are typically those with potential for significant patient impact. Dosing adjustments based on hepatic or renal function may be recommended. Alternative medications may be recommended in patients who are pregnant or who have medical comorbidities. Pharmacists working with inpatient psychiatrists may also assist in optimizing non-psychiatric medication regimens (eg, medications for infections, diabetes, hypertension).

Formulary and Non-Formulary Requests

- The formulary—a list of approved medications—is determined by a hospital committee, which is usually called the P & T (Pharmacy and therapeutics) committee, or the Formulary committee. The P&T Committee includes pharmacists, physicians, and nurses. They make decisions based on both efficacy and cost-effectiveness, balancing patient care with budget considerations.
- You can request a list of all formulary drugs from the pharmacy.
- If you find that a drug you'd like to prescribe is not on formulary, you can request that it be added. Just call the pharmacy and ask them what the protocol is for making that request. Alternatively, they may provide a suitable therapeutic substitution.

Pharmacists' Role in Patient Care

While not all pharmacists have direct patient contact, in some settings, they do visit units, participate in rounds, and lead patient medication groups, contributing to comprehensive care planning.

How Pharmacists Can Help You

Get to know your hospital's pharmacists and communicate with them frequently. They can assist you with:

- Availability and procurement of new medications.
- Advising on dosing and titration schedules.
- Managing transitions, like from oral antipsychotics to injectables.
- Providing guidance on drug-drug interactions.
- Gathering patient medication history either from the patient or through available records including the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP). Every state has its own PDMP program, which you can find listed here: <https://www.pdmpassist.org/>
- Coordinating "Meds-to-Beds" programs at some hospitals, in which discharge meds are delivered to the bedside before they are discharged, with the pharmacist providing medication counseling and education.

Top Tips for Collaboration

1. Communicate openly about any uncertainties regarding medications.
2. Respect their expertise in pharmacology and involve them in treatment planning.
3. Be responsive to their alerts about medication safety.
4. Ensure all medication orders are clear and complete.
5. Foster a team environment where pharmacists feel valued and integral to patient care.