

Pharmacy Purchasing Outlook

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Promoting The Pharmacy Buyer

**By Kathryn Pflaum, NPPA Advisory Board Member
Inventory Control Coordinator, St. Francis Health Center, Topeka, Kansas**

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Do you ever talk to the Executives or upper management about what you do as a Buyer? Do you talk to the Pharmacy staff about what you do? Do people know what you really do as the Pharmacy Buyer? Buyers in today's environment need to be interacting with all levels of management, Doctor's, Clinical Staff, Nursing Staff, Pharmacy Staff, and Materials Management personnel.

First things first, you need to know your audience to know what topic is relevant to them. Once you understand your audience, what do you say? Always remember, be factual, succinct, and make your point directly and quickly. Keep the topic specific to your audience.

Below are some critical ways to promote the Buyer at any facility:

Know your numbers! Pharmacy Buyer numbers are impressive and you have to toot your own horn about them. Be able to converse about savings opportunities and process changes made by the Buyer that save money. Spreadsheets are an amazing tool for Buyers to keep track of opportunities where savings is found through opportunity buys including short dated discounted products, new medication initial buys, scratch & dent cost reductions offered by some wholesalers (we as a hospital do not care if the outer package looks tattered as long as the medication is useable) and other opportunities that arise for savings.

Know what the total savings is year to date and be able to talk about those. You should also know how much you spent to achieve that savings. Make sure these spreadsheets get shared with your immediate supervisor at least once per month. If your immediate supervisor is not the Director of Pharmacy, make an appointment to spend 20 minutes going over the savings with the Director quarterly.

Know your budget! Where are you each month compared to the budget in purchases? By scouring the P & L statement, you can see where money is coming in and money is being spent. Do you know what rebates you should see on the P & L? Money does not always make its way to the correct ledger entry. Make sure to contact accounting and get these issues corrected. Always copy the Pharmacy Manager and Director when communicating with Accounting. Where have you purchased more than the budget? Be prepared to talk about those with your immediate supervisor monthly or others that may come asking questions (such as Accounting).

These types of questions will always be raised by someone and you can build credibility by knowing the numbers and speaking authoritatively about the reasons overspending or under spending may have occurred. Really, who better to know than the Buyer?

“Hard to procure items” It is an important first step to engaging appropriate facility personnel on alternative product and potentially change processes to streamline medication movement. In our environment today this is one area to promote the Buyer’s outstanding performance by being proactive with facility staff. Do not wait until the shelf is bare, once an issue is discovered, start communicating with the appropriate staff to find an acceptable temporary resolution until the shortage is resolved. Know the current inventory position and how many days/weeks of supply are on hand in the Pharmacy. Ascertain how long the shortage may continue. This knowledge is imperative prior to speaking with any staff to lend credibility to the Buyer.

What tools can be used to keep Buyers up-to-date? Here are a few:

- ASHP: www.ashp.org/shortages?WT.ac=hp%5FPopLinks%5FDrug%5FShortages
- FDA: www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/DrugShortages/ucm050792.htm
- Wholesaler MUS (Manufacturer Unable to Supply) designations
- Contacting the manufacturer customer service department for updates
- Pharmacists in the Pharmacy
- Specialty Doctors within the facility

An example of an opportunity at our hospital came when we initially started having difficulties getting Neuromuscular Blockers. I, as the Buyer, began a discussion with the Head of Anesthesiology to discuss what he felt the options were and what course of action we might take together to insure continued flow of medication. He receives an email every 2–3 weeks unless there is a development of significance that occurs in between those times. Getting his buy-in on what we were doing has become a better team approach and he is comfortable that we will have the medications when he needs them.

Think LEAN! LEAN thinking is a great opportunity to change processes, save money and work with a significant number of people all over the Pharmacy and/or facility. We have achieved savings and better processes by using the LEAN model of thinking. Buyers in many instances already think this way. Putting the information in graphs and spreadsheet builds credibility for the Buyer. Graphs especially translate to the Executive suite the great job the Pharmacy Buyer is doing.

Ask Questions! This may seem like a foreign concept to promoting what you do, but by asking questions you are engaging other people around you to be a part of the decision making process. Significant information is needed from a variety of sources including Clinical Staff, Pharmacy Staff, Immediate Supervisor, Department Directors, Manufacturers, Wholesalers, and Materials Management. Once you have a complete understanding, then you are set to show your professional skills to procure the needed medications. Getting the right medications the first time builds your credibility.

Communicate! This is a hard action for many Buyers. It should be the easiest action. Oral communication and written communication are imperative to promoting the Buyer. Think of yourself as the front line to all medications coming into the Pharmacy. The Buyer is the person who knows the incoming medications, where the medications go and what happens to them if/when they are returned. Buyers know the intimate details of medications coming into the Pharmacy and those that are specific to patients/procedures. That is a huge responsibility and a great opportunity to communicate with appropriate staff.

Communicating about shortages, special needs of patient medications, processes that change to enhance the Pharmacy medication flow, where items are located in the Pharmacy if they are new, keeping the shelves organized, price changes where the charges need to be addressed and asking questions to facilitate the Pharmacy and facility needs are all building the credibility of the Buyer.

Communication is the avenue to let others know what you are doing behind the scenes. Unfortunately, if you do not communicate many of your efforts are invisible. Speak up (oral or written) and let others know what you are doing to assist them.

BUYERS ARE KEY TO THE PHARMACY, BECAUSE THE FACILITY NEEDS MEDICATIONS TO OPERATE. SHOW PEOPLE WHAT YOU DO AND HOW WELL YOU DO IT. PROMOTE YOURSELF.

Editor's Notes:

In relation to the websites provided in this article: The NPPA website maintains an RSS feed of Shortages Information directly from the ASHP website on the Member-Only Resources page (login & password can be found in each edition of PPO, the official NPPA publication). The FDA website has similar shortage information, but the ASHP site maintains a continuous record of each shortage, with any updated information about the drug all on a single page, so that tracking a shortage from the very beginning is much easier to keep up with.

And of course, we thank Kathy Pflaum for her input and contribution with this article. The reference to LEAN here was in regards to a method that more and more hospitals are now using and advocating, to help reduce costs, inefficiency, and waste, which Kathy spoke on at this year's NPPA Conference: "Is Your Facility Lean Yet? Cutting Costs, Improving Safety, Quality, & Employee Morale."