

## Actions to ensure patient safety when you outsource prescriptions to a community pharmacy or online veterinary pharmacy

by Elaine Blythe, PharmD

- The most impactful way that your team can positively influence patient safety is to communicate clearly when calling in prescriptions to a pharmacy. Navigate the phone system to reach a live person as opposed to leaving a recording. After you communicate the prescription elements, ask the pharmacist to repeat those elements back to you to ensure there were no miscommunications.
- Take opportunities to educate pharmacy personnel about the clinical uses or indications of the drugs you are outsourcing. This can help build professional relationships and encourage effective professional communications.
- Encourage pharmacists and pharmacies to purchase a valid, reputable veterinary drug information resource to verify dosages or indications. Plumbs Veterinary Drugs is an excellent, easy to use reference.
- To reduce the chance of one drug being substituted for another when you do not want that substitution, write out "do not substitute" on the face of the prescription.
  - One example is liquid gabapentin prescriptions. There is one manufacturer of generic gabapentin liquid that *does not* contain xylitol. To prevent the potential for xylitol toxicity in a dog, write out "xylitol free formulation, do not substitute" on the gabapentin prescription.
  - Veterinary teams can implement this same approach with insulin prescriptions; write out "do not substitute" to prevent more affordable insulins from being substituted for more expensive insulins. Pharmacists should never substitute one insulin for another due to their different onset and duration profiles but, such unauthorized substitutions have been reported.
- If you issue a written prescription, make sure it is *clear and legible* to prevent misreading a drug name (azathioprine versus azithromycin) drug strengths (10mg versus 100mg) or route of administration (using an eye drop in the ear).
- Pharmacists cannot recommend the use of OTC drugs in pets, only a veterinarian can. However, if you instruct a pet owner to purchase an OTC drug for use in their animal, they may consult the pharmacist to help locate the drug. Ideally, write out the OTC drug name, strength, dosage form and directions for use so that the pharmacist can use that to help guide the owner towards the correct product and reinforce instructions for use.

- Pharmacists are legally required to counsel pet owners on all new prescriptions. However, they may not feel completely comfortable doing so because of their lack of veterinary pharmacy education or experience. Make sure you or your veterinary care team counsels the animal owner on all prescriptions that you outsource to a pharmacy. Tell the owner the drug name, strength, directions for use, possible side effects and any refills at the time you give them the prescription.
- While not a patient safety issue, pharmacies may ask a veterinarian for their NPI number. *An NPI number is specific to human health care providers only.* Offer your state license number as a substitute. When pet owners utilize a drug discount coupon service for a prescription, that company requests the prescriber's information such as an NPI number or DEA registrant number at the time of prescription fulfillment.

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Dr. Blythe is also adjunct faculty at University of Florida College of Pharmacy where she teaches online courses veterinary pharmacy to pharmacy students and pharmacists.

In addition to her full-time teaching, Dr. Blythe has over 20 years' experience in regulatory affairs consulting services for veterinary drug distributors focusing on wholesale drug distribution and state pharmacy licensing requirements.