

Pharmacy Safety and Security Checklist

Pharmacy robberies continue to be a problem nationwide, especially in Ontario which had the largest pharmacy losses of opioids (codeine, fentanyl, hydromorphone, morphine, and oxycodone) amongst all Canadian provinces and territories with an increasing trend in armed robberies (based on data from January 2012 to September 2017).ⁱ Pharmacy robberies not only contribute to the ongoing opioid crisis and substance abuse concerns in Canada but can also have negative impacts on pharmacy operations and the staff and patients involved. As such, the Ontario Pharmacists Association (OPA) has put together a checklist of some possible strategies that can be considered for implementation to help mitigate risk and protect the pharmacy, staff and patients from robberies and break-ins. Recognizing that each pharmacy is unique, this checklist is meant to be a general guide of possible strategies to consider for use as applicable. OPA acknowledges that many pharmacies may already have policies and procedures in place, and in the event of differences, pharmacy professionals should defer to their corporate, chain and/or store policies and procedures, and are encouraged to speak to their head offices, pharmacy managers, and/or owners for further clarification as required. This checklist may be used to supplement that information as applicable.

Physical Design

CPTED is one of the most common methods used to reduce robbery and violence rates.ⁱⁱ The CPTED model is based on three underlying principles: natural surveillance, natural access control, and territorial reinforcement.ⁱⁱⁱ Some potential strategies are presented below; for more information visit [CPTED Canada](#).

Natural
Surveillance

Natural
Access Control

Territorial
Reinforcement

Lighting

- Use and maintenance of bright and high-quality lighting^{iv,v}
 - *Lighting quality should facilitate obtaining accurate suspect description, clearly observing activities, etc.*
 - *Known safety standards for nighttime lighting: parking lot = 1.75 fc; main entrance = 4.5 fc; sidewalks = 2.0 fc*
- Pharmacy lighting is positioned to evenly illuminate important areas that require visibility without casting shadows^{v,vi}
 - *E.g., entrances and exits, dispensary, back door, receiving areas*
- Use of motion-sensitive floodlighting on the exterior as appropriate^{iv,v}
 - *E.g., for “back of house” areas like the dumpster*
- Protect light fixtures from vandalism as required^v

Visibility

- Keep windows clear of obstructions^{vii,viii}
 - *There should be clear viewing access to allow staff to notice suspicious people outside as well as allow passersby to see inside the pharmacy*
- The layout of the store ensures that staff have a clear view of the store as well as the dispensary^{iv,v}
 - *E.g., avoid sharp corners; ensure beams/retaining walls do not block windows; position store shelves to support clear sightlines; use glass or mirrors to increase visibility*

Environment

- Pharmacy is located in a busy area with lots of pedestrian traffic^{vii}
- All building access points are clearly defined and visible^v
- Use of physical barriers as appropriate
 - *E.g., deadbolt locks, shatterproof glass, external bars or security gates on doors and windows^{viii,ix}*
- Doors leading to receiving areas are solid-core and dead-bolted^{vii}
- All doors are secure and locks in good working order^{vii}
- The design of the pharmacy is simple and easy to follow^v
- The pharmacy is laid out so there is little-to-no unusable space^v
- The pharmacy counter is ideally 48” high and 36” deep^v
- Height reference tape is placed near entrances and counters^{ix}

Implementation of a High-quality Security System

Security systems involving video surveillance with CCTVs and alarms can be used in pharmacies as a strategy to prevent robberies. CCTVs are commonly used to deter and prevent crime, but evidence of its crime prevention capabilities is inconclusive.^x However, an analysis based on data from the RxPatrol program found that of the 1,900 pharmacy burglaries recorded, 77% of those pharmacies had no video surveillance cameras.^{xi} Alarms can also be a key protective feature to deter offenders and prevent burglary as it has been found that non-alarmed properties have a 4.57 times higher probability of burglary than properties with alarms.^{xii}

Installation of a video surveillance system

- The pharmacy has and maintains digital, high resolution colour CCTV recording capability (for the interior and exterior)^{v,viii}
- Cameras are positioned appropriately and provide a clear view
 - *E.g., main areas of the pharmacy, cash registers, doorway areas, drive-thru windows, "dead" spots*^{viii,ix,xiii}
- Pharmacy counter cameras capture multiple views^v
 - *E.g., overhead, outwards from the counter to capture an individual's face*
- Surveillance taping or digital recording is used 24/7^{vii}
- CCTV recordings are kept in a secure location – either at an offsite location or hidden^{viii}
- CCTV recordings are retained for at least 7 days^v
- Easily visible CCTV monitors or signage that the pharmacy has an advanced surveillance system are in place^{iv}
 - *E.g., advertise the presence of cameras or include a CCTV monitor that displays the image at the entrance to the pharmacy*

Installation of an alarm system

- A security alarm system is in place
 - *Possible features: glass break detectors and high security door locks^v*
 - *Possible alarmed areas: doors, windows, skylights, receiving areas and other high security areas^{ix}*
- The alarm system installed can still operate in case of a power outage or cut telephone lines^v
- Easily visible signage that the pharmacy has an advanced alarm system in place^{viii}

Panic Alarm

- Availability of a panic alarm/button that is accessible to employees and conveniently placed, but not subject to false activation
 - *Silent alarms are preferred (audible alarms may be helpful in after-hours break-ins)^{iv}*

Operational Initiatives

Pharmacy professionals have an important role to play when it comes to minimizing diversion of controlled substances. As per OCP's [Standards of Operation for Pharmacies](#), pharmacies must have processes in place to ensure that medications are stored in a safe, secure, and appropriate manner and location prior to dispensing.^{xiv} In addition, best practices regarding inventory management, identifying forgeries, safe money handling, etc. should be implemented to deter criminal activities.

Security of controlled substances

- Controlled substances are not in public view^{ix}
- Use of a safe that is bolted to the floor and not visible to the public^{iv,v}
 - *A good option may be a safe that has a key lock for use during the day and a combination lock that can be used after hours. Can also consider the use of a time-delay safe; see OPA's fact sheet on [Time-delay Safes](#) for more information.*

Inventory management

- Onsite stock of controlled substances is kept to a minimum if possible^{viii}
- A daily dispensing stock of narcotics and if known, other commonly targeted controlled substances, is kept in a readily accessible safe for pharmacy use and the bulk of the stock is locked in a separate location away from convenient access or view^{iv}
 - *Stock can be replenished on a daily basis before the pharmacy opens to the public.*
- Easily visible signage informing the public that the pharmacy keeps a limited stock of controlled substances on the premise^{vii}

Policies on dispensing controlled substances

- Procedure on how to handle new patients with prescriptions for controlled substances^{iv}
 - *E.g., best practice is to gather complete demographic information and medication history; verify prescriptions with prescribers using reputable information such as the phone number for the prescriber from CPSO's website^{iv,vii}*
- Policy on how to deal with "fishing" phone calls^{iv}
 - *E.g., calls asking if you have certain controlled substances on hand and how much*
- Limit quantities of controlled substances dispensed per fill as appropriate and required^{iv}

Operations

- Place popular products near the dispensary to attract customers (i.e., increase potential witnesses)^v
- Establish policy on issuance of keys^{ix}
 - *E.g., limit the number of key holders, number the keys, include "Do Not Duplicate" on keys*
- Review internal processes for ordering, receiving, storing and destruction of controlled substances to find and fix any potential gaps^{ix}

Operations (continued)

- Engage in safe money handling practices
 - *E.g., do not keep large cash amounts at the store; use a drop safe or night deposit (avoid keeping cash in the pharmacy overnight); ensure at least two people are making night deposits and do not go at the same time every night; do not have cash in plain sight; use a safe that requires two people or two keys to open; post signage that only a limited amount of cash is kept on hand and no large bills^{vii,viii,xiii}*
- Ensure management and local police department contact information is up to date and easily available^{vii}
 - *E.g., post the number to the local police department on all phone extensions in the pharmacy and front store*
- Invite local police to your store to discuss crime prevention strategies^{vii}
- Establish strong working relationships between staff and adjacent businesses^v

Employee policies and procedures

- All staff should receive training on pharmacy safety and loss prevention policies and procedures upon hire and at regular intervals thereafter (e.g., during annual staff reviews)^{vii}
 - *Increased awareness can also be achieved by use of posters, checklists, etc. posted in break rooms^{vi}*
- Staff should not discuss pharmacy security procedures with anybody who does not work at the pharmacy^{viii}
- Adequate staffing is available, especially during evening and late-night shifts^{iv,viii}
- Background checks are conducted on all staff before hiring^{viii}
 - *Especially important for those staff working in the dispensary and/or with cash*
- Policies and procedures are reviewed with all staff after the occurrence of any pharmacy safety incident^{vii}
- All personal belongings are locked up^{vii}

Staff

All pharmacy staff (permanent, relief, volunteers, etc.) should be trained on the store's safety and security policies and procedures including what they can do to protect themselves and those around them in case of a robbery. Staff should be involved with the process and encouraged to ask questions and make suggestions to make the pharmacy safer. Having staff and management work together is the key to an effective prevention program.

Mandatory training for all staff on how to:

- Operate security-relevant equipment such as CCTVs, alarms, safes, etc. as appropriate for their role^{iv}
- Identify prescription forgeries and how to handle those situations
 - Refer to OCP's Fact Sheets on [Forgery: Tips for Identifying Fraudulent Prescriptions](#) and [Forgery: Management and Reporting of Fraudulent Prescriptions](#)
- Recognize warning signs of a robbery; be alert and aware of suspicious patrons/behaviour^{viii}
- React in the event of a robbery or break-in^{iv,viii}
 - Refer to OPA's fact sheet on [Reacting to a Pharmacy Robbery](#) for more information

ABBREVIATIONS:

CCTV: closed circuit television; **CPSO:** College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario; **CPTED:** Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design; **fc:** foot-candles; **OCP:** Ontario College of Pharmacists

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DISCLAIMER:

The Ontario Pharmacists Association (OPA) provides this material to pharmacy professionals for informational purposes only. It is intended to provide pharmacy professionals with general considerations to improve the safety and security of the pharmacy to prevent robberies. The information provided may not be comprehensive and does not replace professional judgement and responsibilities. It is provided without warranty of any kind by OPA and OPA assumes no responsibility for any errors, omissions or inaccuracies therein. The decision for use and application of this document is the responsibility of the user. OPA assumes no liability for such use and application or any resulting outcomes. It is the responsibility of the pharmacy professional to use professional judgment in evaluating this material in light of any relevant situational data. It is intended to supplement materials provided by regulatory authorities, and should there be any discrepancies, municipal, provincial, and federal laws, policies and guidelines shall prevail. This information is up to date as at the date of publication. Pharmacy professionals are encouraged to use other resources that are appropriate and available to them.

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