

Institute for Safe Medication Practices

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ISMP Issues Guidance on the Interdisciplinary Safe Use of Automated Dispensing Cabinets

Horsham, Pa.— Automated dispensing cabinets (ADCs) are widely used in many healthcare systems for the storage and dispensing of medications. This technology may offer many benefits, but design and use must be carefully planned and implemented to ensure the safe use of medications. In addition, there must be collaboration on ADC use between the healthcare professions, especially pharmacy and nursing personnel, since each hold a large stake in the medication use process. Despite the growing popularity of this technology, little formalized, truly interdisciplinary guidance exists to direct organizations in its safe use. The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) recently released a set of interdisciplinary guidelines to promote safe practices with ADCs.

In 1998, the American Society of Health System Practitioners published guidelines on the safe use of automated medication storage and distribution devices, with recommendations geared toward pharmacy practitioners. Since the capabilities of ADCs have continued to advance, more health systems are implementing it and need more guidance on interdisciplinary collaboration in the use of this technology. ISMP convened a national forum of stakeholders in spring 2007 to help fill the void.

The forum, which was supported by Cardinal Health, McKesson, and Omnicell, included pharmacists, nurses, and ADC vendor representatives with extensive operational knowledge of this technology. Participants represented large regional groups, academic medical centers, and freestanding, specialty, and critical access hospitals. The group developed guidelines for safe ADC use that focus on a collaborative approach and are based on twelve core processes:

- Provide Ideal Environmental Conditions for the Use of ADCs
- Ensure ADC System Security
- Use Pharmacy-Profiled ADCs
- Identify Information that Should Appear on the ADC Screen

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- Select and Maintain Proper ADC Inventory
- Select Appropriate ADC Configuration
- Define Safe ADC Restocking Processes
- Develop Procedures to Ensure the Accurate Withdrawal of Medications from the ADC
- Establish Criteria for ADC System Overrides
- Standardize Processes for Transporting Medications from the ADC to the Patient's Bedside
- Eliminate the Process for Returning Medications Directly to Their Original ADC Location
- Provide Staff Education and Competency Validation

The guidelines provide specific safe process recommendations for each of these core processes. Each process is defined by one or more key characteristics as defined by ISMP's conceptual model, the Key Elements of the Medication Use System.TM

For a copy of ISMP's Guidance on the Interdisciplinary Safe Use of Automated Dispensing Cabinets, visit www.ismp.org/Tools/guidelines/ADC_Guidelines_Final.pdf. For more information or interviews on the guidelines and/or other medication safety issues, contact Renee Brehio at 704-831-8822 or rbrehio@ismp.org.

About ISMP: The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization that works closely with healthcare practitioners and institutions, regulatory agencies, consumers, and professional organizations to provide education about medication errors and their prevention. ISMP represents more than 30 years of experience in helping healthcare practitioners keep patients safe, and continues to lead efforts to improve the medication use process. For more information on ISMP, or its medication safety alert newsletters and other tools for healthcare professionals and consumers, visit www.ismp.org.

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