

Institute for Safe Medication Practices
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**ISMP Survey Shows Prescription Time
Guarantees May Lead to Errors**

Horsham, Pa---Survey results recently released by the Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) provide insight into how pharmacy guarantees to fill prescriptions within a specified time are implemented, and how pharmacists link these time guarantees to medication errors. The intensity of sentiments from pharmacists surveyed call for a more in-depth exploration of the issue and discussion of how it impacts patient safety.

ISMP's community pharmacy time guarantee survey, fielded in June and July of this year, received more than 650 responses. It was conducted in cooperation with the American Pharmacists Association (APhA), the largest and oldest professional society of pharmacists in the U.S. The survey respondents worked in chain pharmacies (45%), independent pharmacies (20%), or grocery store/mass merchant pharmacies (25%) as staff pharmacists (49%) or pharmacy managers (32%).

More than a quarter (27%) of respondents reported that their pharmacies advertise a time guarantee to patients. Of these, 49% do not have provisions that allow pharmacists to exceed the time promised. These guarantees ranged from one prescription per hour to 10 prescriptions in 10 minutes (i.e., 1 minute per prescription). About 75% cited a guarantee of 15 minutes to fill one to three prescriptions. In 21% of pharmacies with time guarantees, patients receive a reward or incentive, such as a pharmacy coupon if the prescription is not filled in time.

Nearly half (49%) said they are penalized if they do not meet the advertised time, most often due to multiple causes, including adjudicating insurance issues (87%), encountering prescription volumes that exceed resources (77%), clarifying the prescription with the prescriber (77%), and providing patients with information or other services such as immunizations (61%). Twenty-three percent said they were incentivized through salary bonuses for meeting the time guarantees.

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Eighty-three percent of pharmacists working at pharmacies with advertised time guarantees reported that the guarantee was a contributing factor to dispensing errors; almost half of them (49%) felt it was a significant factor. In fact, 44% of pharmacists working in pharmacies with time guarantees reported a dispensing error they were personally involved in that was directly attributed to rushing to fulfill the guarantee.

All respondents, regardless of whether they worked in pharmacies with time guarantees, were asked if they favor or oppose regulations from state boards of pharmacies that would prohibit the use of time guarantees or promises. Overall, the majority of respondents strongly (71%) favored such regulations.

ISMP believes that time guarantees should not be the primary way patients measure community pharmacy performance, and that the effect of guarantees on patient safety needs to be addressed. The adverse effects of time guarantees also spill over into the inpatient setting by perpetuating a diminished role for pharmacists in general. ISMP is advocating for change on a national level to ensure that the important role pharmacists play in patient safety is not compromised.

For an *ISMP Medication Safety Alert!* newsletter article that discusses the time guarantee survey in more detail, visit: www.ismp.org/Newsletters/acutecare/showarticle.asp?id=30

About ISMP: The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) is an independent, nonprofit charitable 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 35 years of experience in helping healthcare practitioners keep patients safe, and continues to lead efforts to improve the medication use process. ISMP is a federally certified patient safety organization (PSO), providing healthcare practitioners and organizations with the highest level of legal protection and confidentiality for patient safety data and error reports they submit to the Institute. For more information on ISMP, or its medication safety alert newsletters and other tools for healthcare professionals and consumers, visit www.ismp.org