

NIHR Greater Manchester PSTRC

Plain English Publication Summary

Publication: [Mind the gap: Examining work-as-imagined and work-as-done when dispensing medication in the community pharmacy setting](#)

Publication details (Vancouver format)

Ashour A, Ashcroft DM, Phipps DL. Mind the gap: Examining work-as-imagined and work-as-done when dispensing medication in the community pharmacy setting. Appl Ergon. 2021;93:103372.

What are the most important findings/conclusions in this paper? Why are they important?

This paper examined the work that is carried out by community pharmacists (for example, dispensing medication), and found that there are differences between how pharmacy procedures say medications should be dispensed and how this is done in practice. There were four main reasons why these differences occur, which were:

1. Improving efficiency
2. The availability of resources
3. Passing on responsibility to someone else
4. Improving how thoroughly checks are done

What did you do?

We used a method called 'task analysis' to look at how pharmacy tasks are done. This allowed us to compare how they are described in the procedures with how they are done in real life by pharmacy staff.

Information for this analysis was collected from three sets of pharmacy 'standard operating procedures', and from watching pharmacists doing real-life work. A panel of experienced community pharmacists helped the researchers to identify the similarities and differences, and to understand why these were happening.

Why did you conduct this research?

The aim of standard operating procedures (SOPs) is to make sure pharmacy work is safe and of a high quality. It is assumed that if SOPs are not followed, the work taking place will be inappropriate. However, there has been a lot of debate about whether SOPs do what they set out to, both in community pharmacies and in other healthcare settings. In reality, some procedures do need to be changed in everyday pharmacy practice, but they can still be safe, so we need to make sure that SOPs are flexible enough to allow for these changes.

What was known before your paper was published?

Before this study, research had identified that pharmacy staff are expected to follow procedures, but that sometimes they felt it was impossible to do so. The reasons why it can be difficult to follow SOPs include:

- high workload
- lack of pharmacy staff
- poor communication
- business pressures

In one previous study, researchers had identified 31 differences between what policies said should happen, and what happened in real-life work. But instead of making care less safe, some of these actually helped to make work safer or more efficient.

What is next? What is the potential impact of the work in this paper? What will change as a result of this paper (or the study it describes)?

The findings from this study are important because they help us to understand how community pharmacy work is carried out. They will also lead to further work to identify potential errors and the skills needed by the pharmacy staff to avoid them.

Does this paper link in to a particular study / project? If so, please summarise the study and explain how this paper has improved understanding, or will move the study forward.

This paper is part of a project looking at ways to improve quality and safety in community pharmacies. The project pinpoints potential risks in pharmacy practice and suggests ways to reduce these risks. The work presented in this paper has helped us to examine community pharmacy tasks, which has highlighted other parts of community pharmacy work that need further investigation.