

# IMPROVE PATIENTS' DRUG COMPLIANCE—PROVIDE MEDICATION INFORMATION

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Every doctor has encountered the following scenario. You write a prescription for a patient. After taking one or two tablets, the patient develops an allergy or a serious side effect and has to discontinue the medication. The patient has spent \$40 or more for that medication, but the pharmacy will not take it back or give the patient a refund. So you write another prescription, and the patient has to pay more money. Just underneath the surface, or maybe right out front, that patient is seething, angry at you and the pharmaceutical industry.

The consequence of this series of events is terrible: The patient gets a negative impression of the pharmaceutical industry and the medical profession. Read this chapter and I guarantee this situation will not arise again.

Like most physicians, I have a cabinet full of samples from pharmaceutical representatives (drug reps). In the past, I have used the samples for patients who have limited budgets for medications—giving them a full 2-week course of antibiotics if they cannot afford the medication. (See Additional Resources at the end of the chapter for information on accessing medications for your patients with limited budgets.)

I have developed a simple system to effectively use sample medications and avoid the situation described above. First, I give all patients receiving a new prescription a 2- to 3-day supply of samples in addition to their prescription. I instruct my patients to use the samples first. If they have no unusual or allergic reactions, they should then fill the prescription. I also find it useful, when obtaining a culture and determining sensitivity, to provide samples until the sensitivity pattern has been revealed. This avoids the situation in which a patient buys a full prescription only to learn that the medication is not the best drug for the infection.

Next, patients are provided with instructions for taking the medications (see one example in Exhibit 7-1). The instructions inform the patients of the common, the less

## Exhibit 7-1 Instructions for Taking Viagra

Dr. Neil Baum  
3525 Prytania  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70115  
www.neilbaum.com  
(504) 891-8454

## Viagra (sildenafil)

## WHY is this drug prescribed?

Viagra is used for treatment of impotence (difficulty achieving or maintaining erections). Erections are created by trapping blood under pressure within the chambers of the penis. Viagra has been shown to affect a normally occurring chemical in the penis (nitric oxide) that allows the penis to trap blood within its chambers more efficiently. The end result is an erection that is more rigid and lasts longer. Viagra has been approved by the Federal Drug Administration as an oral medication for the treatment of impotence.

## HOW does Viagra work?

In order for an erection to occur, there must be smooth muscle relaxation in the erection chambers of the penis. Viagra works by increasing the smooth muscle relaxation in the penis by blocking an enzyme phosphodiesterase type 5 (PDE-5), which is found in high concentrations in the penis.

## HOW do I take Viagra?

Viagra comes in 25-, 50-, and 100-mg tablets. One tablet is taken by mouth 30–45 minutes before sexual activity.

## HOW should Viagra be used?

Viagra works best if taken without a fatty meal, that is, no cheeseburgers, pizza, or fries. The drug also seems to be more effective without using large quantities of alcohol. In order for an erection to occur with Viagra, you will need genital stimulation. Viagra may require 6–8 attempts before it is successful, so don't give up if the drug does not work after 1–2 attempts.

## WHAT are the side effects of Viagra?

The side effects associated with Viagra are usually mild, transient, and reversible. They include headache (16%), flushing (11%), indigestion (7%), and runny nose or nasal congestion (7%). Rarely, transient visual disturbances (a blue-green haze) will occur with Viagra (3%). If symptoms are severe, the drug should be stopped until the symptoms subside. Your physician should be notified before you restart the drug.

## WHAT are the contraindications to using Viagra?

Men who take or need nitroglycerin or nitates in any form (pill, under the tongue, paste, injection, or any nitrate ampules), should not use this treatment for impotence. Cilostazol (Pletal) and erythronycin users had slightly higher blood levels but without consequences. Viagra should not be used in men with a recent history of heart attack or with unstable or very high blood pressure. Pilots should not take Viagra within 6 hours of flying due to the rare side effect of visual disturbances.

## HOW OFTEN can I use Viagra?

The recommended use is no more than once a day or once in a 24-hour period.

## WHAT are the options if Viagra does not work?

Viagra works in 70–80% of all users of the medication. If Viagra does not work, contact your physician, as there are other options that can help nearly all men achieve an erection adequate for sexual intimacy with their partner. Additional information is available on Dr. Baum's Web site, [www.neilbaum.com](http://www.neilbaum.com).

common, and even the rare side effects associated with the medications. Also included in this information sheet are precautions, such as avoiding alcohol, and warnings about drug and food interactions. In addition to this sheet, we also fill out the form "A Dozen Questions to Help You Understand Your Medicines" (see Exhibit 7-2).

## Exhibit 7-2 A Dozen Questions to Help You Understand Your Medicines

1. What are the brand and generic names of the medicine?  
Brand \_\_\_\_\_  
Generic \_\_\_\_\_
  2. What is the medicine supposed to do?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  3. How should I use the medicine?  
In the eye or ear? \_\_\_\_\_  
By mouth? \_\_\_\_\_ Other? \_\_\_\_\_  
On the skin? \_\_\_\_\_  
How much? \_\_\_\_\_  
How often? \_\_\_\_\_  
For how long? \_\_\_\_\_  
With meals? \_\_\_\_\_
  4. What should I do if I miss a dose?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  5. When should I expect the medicine to begin working?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  6. How will I know if the medicine is working?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  7. What should I do if the medicine doesn't seem to work?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  8. What side effects should I watch for?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How long will they last?  
\_\_\_\_\_

(continued)

What should I do if they occur?  
\_\_\_\_\_

How can I lessen the side effects?  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. While using this medicine, should I avoid:

driving?	_____Yes	_____No
drinking alcohol?	_____Yes	_____No
eating certain foods?	_____Yes	_____No
taking certain medicines?	_____Yes	_____No

Are there any other precautions? \_\_\_\_\_

10. How should I store the medicine? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Can I get a refill? \_\_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_\_No When? \_\_\_\_\_

12. Are there special instructions about how to use the medicine?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Since most physicians commonly prescribe from a group of perhaps 15 to 30 drugs the majority of the time, you can provide your patients with information by preparing a sheet with the most frequently asked questions (or FAQs) about these medications. Another option is to refer them to *The Pill Book* (see Additional Resources), which lists the precautions associated with hundreds of drugs.

When I write a prescription, I attach it to the front of the chart and hand it to my nurse. She then gives the patient the appropriate drug information sheet. While the patient is reading the drug interaction information, my nurse retrieves the samples from the sample closet. The nurse asks the patient if he or she has any questions about the medications and then writes in the chart that the drug information form and samples were given to the patient.

Let me give you an example of just how useful it is to have patients read such information before they leave the office. It is not possible for me to cover every side effect or drug interaction with each patient—there just isn't time. On one occasion I prescribed a quinolone antibiotic. The patient read the drug information that the nurse gave her, which mentions theophylline-containing medications as one of the contraindications of using quinolones. As it happened, this patient was using a theophylline inhaler for her chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. She mentioned this to the nurse, who told me, and I changed the prescription to another medication. This drug information prevented a patient leaving with a prescription that could have resulted in lethal levels of theophylline. By the way, I now ask every patient about theophylline before prescribing a quinolone!

We also give our patients a cost-comparison sheet of the drug prices at four or five pharmacies in the area. We circle the prescribed medications with a yellow highlighter pen.

Table 7-1

**Sample Cost-Comparison Sheet**

Pharmacy →	Rite Aid	Winn Dixie	C&G's	Castellon
Medication Name ↓	Generic/Brand	Generic/Brand	Generic/Brand	Generic/Brand
Macrobid #30	66.00/ 102.00	59.95/ 100.95	16.15/ 73.56	24.04/ 75.27
Ditropan #30 XL 5 mg	100.00/ 159.00	101.95/ 118.95	83.65/ 102.25	89.70/ 108.95
Pyridium #30 200 mg	31.00/NA	35.95/79.95	9.60/NA	9.12/NA
Vibra Tabs #28 100 mg	21.00/NA	13.95/239.95	10.57/148.85	7.57/158.61
Cipro #28 50 mg	65.00/ 171.00	10.95/ 159.95	17.15/ 122.75	8.15/NA
Viagra #10 50 mg	NA/149.00	NA/141.95	NA/132.22	NA/136.85
Bactrim DS #28	26.00/NA	35.95/83.95	12.43/NA	8.74/61.38

NA = "Not Available"

This allows patients to select a pharmacy close to the office or their residence, where they can purchase the medications inexpensively. Often the drug companies will provide cost information regarding their particular medications at the various pharmacies. Table 7-1 is a sample cost-comparison sheet of the type we give to our patients. We update this cost-comparison sheet annually.

You can also alert your patients to Internet sources for ordering drug products, if they do not already know about them. Several are listed in the Internet Sources section at the end of this chapter. Your patients will appreciate the fact that you are searching out sources of the best bargains for them.

Finally, when I recommend a procedure or medication that requires self-injections or a sterile technique or that is likely to produce significant side effects, I contact the patient by telephone. I ask if the patient has had any problems or has any questions. I think this reassures the patient, and it allows me to troubleshoot any potential problems. (For details on calling patients at home, see Chapter 9.)

Exhibit 7-3 Prescription Pad

NEIL H. BAUM, M.D.  
 SUITE 614  
 3525 PRYTANIA  
 NEW ORLEANS, LA 70115  
 (504) 891-8454

DEA# AB 8981703

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**DISP.: 30**

AVODART 0.5 mg	Sig. T
UROXATRAL 10 mg	Q.D.
FLOMAX .4 mg	B.I.D.
DITROPAN XL 5/10	T.I.D.
CASODEX 50 mg	Q.I.D.
FLUTAMIDE 125 MG	P.R.N.
HYTRIN 5 mg	H.S.
CARDURA 1/2/4	

REFILL \_\_\_\_\_ times PRN NR

\_\_\_\_\_ M.D. \_\_\_\_\_ M.D.

Product Selection Permitted                      Dispense As Written

Another step to make prescribing easier is to have color-coded prescription pads printed. Medications in the same drug class can be printed on the same pad, with a different color for each group. Then all you have to do is circle the medication and specify the dosing instructions and the number of tablets or pills. You save time and reduce the number of prescription pads floating around your office. (Exhibit 7-3 is a sample of the prescription pad.) Most pharmaceutical companies will provide you with script pads that include their competitors' product. Just offer to put their product at the top of the list. Also, on the back of script, I include healthy lifestyle suggestions (Exhibit 7-4).

Many offices now fax prescriptions to pharmacies, so that the prescription is ready when the patient arrives to pick it up. And increasingly, hospitals and medical practices are now e-mailing prescriptions. Pharmacies do not encourage these methods because patients spend less time in the store (and thus are less likely to buy other items), but your patients will certainly appreciate it.

**Exhibit 7-4 Healthy Lifestyle Suggestion on The Back of The Prescription**

Dr. Baum's 10 Tips for Good Health:

1. Exercise regularly
2. Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables
3. Limit red meat and high cholesterol foods
4. Stop smoking
5. Drink alcohol in moderation
6. Drink 8-10 glasses of water/day
7. Maintain your ideal weight
8. Get a PSA and prostate exam yearly
9. Examine your testicles or breasts monthly
10. See your doctor for regular checkups

Without exception, my patients appreciate my approach to using sample medications. If each step is recorded in the patient's chart, this approach also provides medico-legal protection in case your patient experiences an adverse reaction to the medication.

In addition, using this approach saves your patients money. This method lets your patients know that you are aware of the spiraling cost of health care and that you are doing your part to keep down their expenses. Now that is a "spoonful of sugar" to help the medicine go down.

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** The Bottom Line**

Your patients are likely to be knowledgeable about their diagnosis, evaluation, and medications. If you can provide them with additional information about their medications, as well as pricing, your services to your patients will be greatly appreciated.

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**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Silverman, HM, *The Pill Book*, 13th. (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell), 2008.

*The PDR Pocket Guide to Prescription Drugs: 7th Edition* (New York: Simon and Schuster Adult Publishing Group), 2005.

Wolfe, SM, Sasich, LD, Lurie, P, *Worst Pills, Best Pills: A Consumer's Guide to Avoiding Drug-Induced Death or Illness* (New York: Pocketbooks), 2005.

Pharmaceutical companies have made available millions of dollars of medication for the medically indigent. Select Care Benefits Network, a patient advocacy organization, provides over \$35,000,000 worth of free medications through Patient Assistance Programs. There are resources for patients and healthcare professionals (who might wish to automate their qualification process for patients) on their Web site, <http://www.scbn.org>; patients can also call their toll-free number: (888) 331-1002. Another source is [Pharma.org](http://www.pharma.org), a gateway site to other resources. Contact (800) 762-4636 (operators speak both English and Spanish) or go to <http://www.pharma.org>.

### INTERNET SOURCES

- [www.drugstore.com](http://www.drugstore.com)—This Web site allows online price comparisons of most major medications and lets customers order online and have prescriptions mailed to them. Additional services include newsletters and patient advice, Rite-Aid refills online, and pharmacists who will answer questions about your medications.
- [www.pharmacy.com](http://www.pharmacy.com)—A division of Rotech, this company also allows the ability to order drugs online. Additional services include creating your own Web page and free e-mail.
- [www.planetrx.com](http://www.planetrx.com)—This Web site is a full-service online pharmacy devoted to health and wellness needs of patients.
- [www.rxlist.com](http://www.rxlist.com)—This is also a reliable site for good, accurate drug information.

# ONE-STOP SHOPPING: INCORPORATE IN-OFFICE DISPENSING OF MEDICATIONS\*

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*Out-of-the-box thinking means tossing around lots of ideas until you come up with one that creates that knock-out punch.*

One of those knock-out punches is in-office dispensing of medications in doctors' offices. Prior to the 11th century, all drug dispensing was carried out by doctors. Thereafter pharmacists became recognized and started taking over dispensing. In many Asian countries, 80% of the doctors dispense medications. In the United States less than 5% are currently dispensing medications.<sup>1</sup> However, this situation is changing and more doctors are recognizing that this is an opportunity to market their practices and provide an additional revenue stream.

Dr. Patricia Farris has been dispensing both prescription and non-prescription skin-care products for over 20 years and considers it an integral part of her medical practice. When she first began lecturing on this subject over a decade ago, there were only a handful of dermatologists and plastic surgeons dispensing skin-care products, and dispensing was almost non-existent in other medical specialties. Today gynecologists, pediatricians, and even internists are getting involved with dispensing. While skin-care products are by far the most common health-related items sold, we now have ophthalmologists retailing eye-glass frames and primary care physicians dispensing prescription medications. At a time

\*I would like to thank Patricia Farris, MD, for authoring this chapter. Dr. Farris is an Assistant Clinical Professor of Dermatology at Tulane Medical School. She has been dispensing medications in her office for more than 20 years and is a national expert on this topic.

when shrinking reimbursement for medical and surgical services is a reality, office dispensing offers an additional source of revenue for your practice. Your patients will appreciate the convenience of being able to purchase medications or health-related products from your office. Those two factors make direct dispensing a win-win for you and your patients. In this chapter, we will discuss the specifics of direct dispensing and how it can be integrated into medical practice.

## **The Patient-Physician Relationship**

No discussion of office dispensing is complete without addressing the controversy that surrounds this practice. Critics say that selling health-related items creates a conflict of interest with patients when physicians stand to profit from items sold in their offices. They also note that patients might feel pressured or obligated to buy products or medications from their physicians in an attempt to please us and that we compromise our professionalism by selling items that could just as easily be purchased at the pharmacy.

To address this ethical controversy, the Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs of the American Medical Association (AMA) issued guidelines in 1999 on office dispensing, stating that physicians could dispense health-related items from their offices but not for profit. The AMA positioning statement further requires that physicians must disclose fully the nature of their financial arrangement with a manufacturer or supplier to sell health-related products. Disclosure includes informing patients of financial interests as well as the availability of the product or other equivalent products elsewhere, i.e., other services such as pharmacies or through the mail. And finally, the statement made clear that under no circumstances should physicians place their own financial interests above the welfare of their patients. Specialty societies including the American Academy of Dermatology, American Society for Plastic Surgery, and American Society of Internal Medicine have also weighed in on dispensing. These subspecialties support their members engaging in office dispensing as long as it is done in the best interest of the patient.

There is relatively little data on the impact of office dispensing on the physician-patient relationship. One of the few published studies was a survey published in the *Archives of Dermatology* in 2001 that assessed patients' and physicians' attitudes about office dispensing. In this survey, 30 dispensing physicians and 22 patients who purchased products from their dermatologists' office were interviewed. According to dispensing physicians, "trust" was the number one reason why they thought that patients felt comfortable purchasing products in their office. "Physician knowledge" was the most commonly cited reason that patients felt compelled to purchase products from their dermatologist. It is also of interest that none of the patients surveyed felt coerced into purchasing products and the majority saw no downside to direct dispensing.<sup>2</sup> At least in this survey, the patients felt comfortable relying on their physicians to both recommend and provide them with health-related items.

## **Who Can Benefit from**

Patients appreciate being able to purchase prescriptions to be filled can be virtually any study in an outpatient setting.

In this regard, direct dispensing can be a tremendous service. and ultimately better patient outcomes. The majority of the cost for their medical office can be a tremendous service.

For patients with insurance, you this is time consuming and an extra dispensing is best used for the initial prescription a written prescription that can be mailed. It is important to understand that a dispensing license in some states and it is absolutely legal for physicians to do what physicians can do but even though it is illegal in New York, Massachusetts, Missouri where it is illegal.

Check with your state medical board for your state. There may also be specific rules regarding the dispensing of the drugs, and in some states, a pharmacy to dispense prescription medication. Doctors also have to be careful not to receive medication.

When it comes to dispensing of health-related items, the road is much easier for plastic surgeons and dermatologists and the fastest growing category of primary care doctors. Many of these medical spas offering cosmetic services over-the-counter dispensing, and collected at the time of sale.

## **Is Office Dispensing**

If you are considering setting up a practice, you should ask yourself. First, does your specialty have any niche products—either over-the-counter or prescription—to offer to your specialty? If you offer cosmetic skin-care products like moisturizers,

## ***Who Can Benefit from Direct Dispensing?***

Patients appreciate being able to purchase products in the office. Time spent waiting for prescriptions to be filled can be virtually eliminated by direct dispensing. According to a recent study in an outpatient setting, one in three initial prescriptions was never filled.<sup>3</sup>

In this regard, direct dispensing of medications will lead to better patient compliance and ultimately better patient outcomes. For seniors and the uninsured who shoulder the majority of the cost for their medications, offering inexpensive generic options in your office can be a tremendous service.

For patients with insurance, you can set up a system to bill insurance companies, but this is time consuming and an extra burden on your staff. With these patients, office dispensing is best used for the initial prescription. You can then send the patient home with a written prescription that can be used for refills either at the pharmacy or through the mail. It is important to understand that dispensing prescription medications may require a dispensing license in some states and is forbidden or illegal in others. In 44 out of 50 states, it is absolutely legal for physicians to do point-of-care dispensing. The other states restrict what physicians can do but even those states still can dispense. The states that are restricted are: New York, Massachusetts, Montana, Texas, and Wyoming; Utah is the only state where it is illegal.

Check with your state medical board or state medical society to see what laws apply in your state. There may also be specific requirements for labeling prescriptions or recording the dispensing of the drugs, and in some states such as Louisiana you must register as a pharmacy to dispense prescription medications. Louisiana also requires that doctors use prescription labels and that the doctor provide printed instructions on the proper use of the medication. Doctors also have to keep records on what is dispensed and what patients received medication.

When it comes to dispensing skin-care products or other over-the-counter health-related items, the road is much easier to navigate. It is estimated that over 50% of practicing plastic surgeons and dermatologists now sell skin-care products from their offices, and the fastest growing category of skin-care dispensers includes gynecologists and primary care doctors. Many of these primary care physicians are employed in salons or medical spas offering cosmetic services. Most states have no licensing requirement for over-the-counter dispensing, and only a tax ID number is required. Sales taxes must be collected at the time of sale.

## ***Is Office Dispensing for You?***

If you are considering setting up an office dispensing operation, there are several things you should ask yourself. First, does the nature of your practice support selling products and are there any niche products—either prescription or over-the-counter—that are unique to your specialty? If you offer cosmetic procedures in your practice, then over-the-counter skin-care products like moisturizers, sunscreens, cleansers, topical antioxidants, and

anti-aging creams are appropriate items. For dental practices, teeth whiteners and electric toothbrushes can be sold, while anti-aging specialists might retail vitamins and nutraceuticals. Podiatry practices can dispense medications to treat warts and athlete's foot, and cream for dry and cracked skin, a common problem seen in a podiatry practice and especially important to treat in the diabetic patient. Since many conditions that podiatrists treat involve muscle and joint pain, topical analgesics comprise a popular category of product dispensed to the podiatric patient. Urologists can dispense testosterone, prostaglandins, and vitamins used for preventing osteoporosis in their prostate cancer patients who use antiandrogens.

Many specialists have had success selling prescription drugs referred to as "lifestyle medications." These are medications that are commonly prescribed but are not likely to be covered by traditional prescription benefits. In dermatology, insurance companies routinely deny medications like Retin A™, Propecia™, and even skin-lightening creams. You can easily offer lifestyle medications at prices competitive with the pharmacy. Some simple guidelines for choosing products are listed in Table 8-1.

Next consider your own personality and style of practice. Ask yourself, how would I incorporate selling products or medications into my daily practice? There is no question that it takes additional time to dispense and usually requires that you delegate staff to assist you. You must make certain that your staff is fully trained regarding the medications or products that you carry and how they are to be used as part of the treatment regimen. Make sure they are up to speed on side effects, contraindications, and potential drug-drug interactions.

And finally, recognize that dispensing anything requires a big commitment on your part. Patients come to you for your advice and ultimately they are looking for "physician knowledge" to guide them. If you choose to sell skin-care products, then you must be an expert resource on skin-care products. If you are selling vitamins, then expertise in their dosing, use, and benefits is key to your success. It is imperative that all of the products that

Table  
8-1**Product Selection Criteria**

- Choose products with scientific validity.
- Select products from reputable companies.
- Choose reasonably priced products.
- Consider generic medications.
- Consider "lifestyle medications."
- Offer products not readily available at retail.

you are dispensing are chosen on scientific merit and that you make product recommendations for each patient on an individual basis. In this regard, office dispensing forces you to keep up on the literature so you can offer good sound advice and up-to-date product recommendations. For instance, if you offer vitamin or herbal supplements, then you can hand out materials to your patients about interactions of some supplements with prescription medications; and, it is also advisable to counsel your patients to fully disclose everything they take so that you may be sure you are not risking adverse reactions when you prescribe medications for them.

## ***Integrating Dispensing into Your Already Busy Practice***

Many physicians complain they are just too busy to dispense. No one would argue that dispensing is not time consuming for you and your staff. If you are dispensing medications, state regulations may require you and you alone to be the dispensing party. For over-the-counter products, you can use your medical assistants and office staff to assist you in dispensing. I think it is important that we make all product selections for our patients and use physician extenders to give instructions and explain product use. You can utilize a specialized "superbill" that contains a list of all the products in your formulary. These are kept in each exam room and individual products recommended can be checked off while you are discussing them with the patient. This superbill is then placed on the front of the chart and the actual products are dispensed at the time of check-out.

## ***Getting Started***

It is wise to limit your formulary in the beginning to just a few products or medications that you most frequently prescribe. If you are a novice skin-care dispenser, choose a reputable company that offers 5 or 10 products with which you can easily become familiar. It is important to have a display case in your reception area that can be used to showcase the products. Patients will enjoy browsing this material while they are waiting to be seen. Promotional information and brochures can be obtained from manufacturers and should also be displayed in the reception area.

For prescription medications, pre-packaged generics are best since they are inexpensive and easy to dispense. Store your prescription medications in a locked cabinet or closet as you would your samples. Controlled medications require a double-locked storage area according to FDA regulations. You may consider having a brochure that explains your direct dispensing program. This can be given to new patients at the time of check-in or made available on your Web site.

Once you have significant sales, you can consider purchasing a computerized point-of-service sales system. These systems track individual and monthly sales and assist in record

keeping and inventory. Many recognize bar code pricing, making it easy for your staff to calculate sales. While these systems are costly, they are worth the extra expense.

There is no doubt that dispensing over-the-counter products is far easier and probably more profitable than dispensing prescription medications. Selling skin-care products, vitamins, and other lifestyle products is an excellent source of additional revenue and sets up a stream of passive income for your practice. Patients enjoy the ease of coming to the office to get their products or medications and often browse inventory to see what's new.

But dispensing health-related products is more than just an additional revenue stream for the savvy practitioner. Dispensing health-related products has inherent marketing value for you and your practice. You can advertise your direct dispensing products in newspapers, magazines, and the Yellow Pages. This brings new patients into your practice that have a targeted interest in the services you provide. Also, when you discuss and recommend products with existing patients, it gives you the opportunity to co-market your other medical services and procedures.

## Direct Dispensing: The Right Way

As with any aspect of medicine, office dispensing should always be done in the best interest of patients. Table 8-2 outlines guidelines for ethical office dispensing. First, never be pushy about product sales or put your financial interests ahead of your patients' well-being. Be mindful of monies that they have already spent and never replace a product unless you can offer one of greater benefit. Dr. Farris often tells a patient who is on another similar product that is effective, "That's a great product so let's keep you on that one." Always suggest several suitable alternatives that can be purchased at the pharmacy if the patient prefers. Most patients will say, "I'd rather just get it here." And finally, choose products or

Table  
8-2

### Guidelines for Ethical Dispensing

- Use dispensing for patients' best interest.
- Never be pushy about product sales.
- Be mindful of monies already spent.
- Never replace a "good product."
- Offer alternatives options available at retail.
- Choose inexpensive health-related items.

medications at a favorable price point. Leave the expensive creams and gadgets to high-end department stores and offer reasonable generic medications for your medical patients. If you follow these ethical guidelines, office dispensing will be a value-added service for your patients.

### The Bottom Line

If you are not dispensing, perhaps this chapter has encouraged you to at least explore the option. Direct dispensing is easy to set up and integrate into your medical practice. It offers your patients a "one stop shop" where they can get medical services and products or medications. You will gain an additional revenue stream for your practice and you can use direct dispensing to market your practice and medical services. For this reason office dispensing is a win-win for you and your patients.

## NOTES

1. Trapp, B. "Practices of Dispensing Doctors—Drug Use and Health Economics." Retrieved September 30, 2008, from [http://archives.who.int/ctum/ctum1997/posters/4b4\\_fin.html](http://archives.who.int/ctum/ctum1997/posters/4b4_fin.html).
2. Obhogu, P, Fleischer, AB, Brodell, RT, et al., "Physicians' and Patients' Perspectives on Office-Based Dispensing: The Central Role of the Physician-Patient Relationship." *Arch Dermatol*, 137 (2001): 151-54.
3. Storm, A, Anderson, SE, Benfeldt, E, Semp J, "One in 3 Prescriptions Are Never Redeemed: Primary Nonadherence in an Outpatient Clinic." *J Am Acad Dermatol*, 59, no. 1 (July 2008): 27-33.