



Beyond the hospital walls: establishing a 'drive through' pharmacy

King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

What was the challenge?

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, KFSHRC patients requiring medication had this prepared in-house and provided to them by a pharmacist prior to discharge. This direct involvement of the pharmacist with this discharge process often led to delays in patients receiving medication due to limited resource capacity to fulfil pharmaceutical requests. Lengthy waits were also an issue for patients needing medication after discharge from KFSHRC (medication refills, for example, could take up to an hour to complete).

Although home delivery services were procured to complete orders of patient medication refills, patient preferences for the 'in person' collection of medication endured – posing an infection control issue during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although usage of the home delivery increased as the pandemic developed, service levels of the delivery companies fell short of patient demand and expectations. Urgently needed medication was delayed or damaged at the time of delivery, and patient satisfaction in the delivery services dropped significantly causing reputational damage to KFSHRC.

What was the task?

To resolve these issues, the KFSHRC set up a 'Drive Through Pharmacy' (DTP) to provide medication services to its outpatients whilst minimising the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Although not a new type of intervention, DTPs are typically found in community settings, not specifically for tertiary hospitals.

What was the action taken?

The DTP replaced the process of outpatients entering the hospital for pharmacy services and effectively reduced the risk of coronavirus exposure of staff to outpatients and vice versa. Only minor additional investments were required, as the DTP was housed in an

available mobile unit, with dispensing equipment being sourced from existing in-house supplies. The DTP required careful logistics planning and was located at the most spacious parking area of the hospital, rather than at the parking area closest to the pharmacy to ensure optimal traffic flow. Patient medications are prepared by staff wearing personal protective equipment and are properly packaged and stored.

Many patients arrived at the 'drive through pharmacy', however sometimes without having ordered, or before their order was processed (usually taking a turnaround of one day). This caused delays (up to one hour), traffic queues and hampered the DTP's potential effectiveness. To overcome these issues, a text message was sent to patients when their medications were ready for collection, along with a verifying SMS receipt, before they could be allowed to access the DTP premises.

What were the results?

Medication refill collection times have been significantly reduced to a few minutes, thanks to a text message alert system which informs patients when their medications are ready for self-collection from the DTP. This throughput time compares very favourably to original waiting times of 30 to 60 minutes when the pharmacy was based within the hospital and required a pharmacist to 'drop off' medication. More than 9,800 medications have been dispensed to more than 3,200 patients since early April 2020, and the DTP receives on average 200 patient visits a day.

The success of this model means that it will continue to be used by the King Faisal Specialist Hospital & Research Center after the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided.