

ISMP Canada Safety Bulletin Supplement

Volume 25 • Issue 1 • Supplement 1 • February 5, 2025

Access to Medication Supply While on Work Leave Contributes to Death

ISMP Canada previously published a bulletin about the security of methadone in the community pharmacy setting and the death of an individual who gained unauthorized access to the medication in this setting.¹ ISMP Canada has learned of additional preventable occurrences of diversion involving methadone and other medications in the hospital setting, including incidents reported by consumers.

INCIDENT DESCRIPTION

Parents shared their concern that their adult child, a hospital employee, had continued to have access to controlled substances at the hospital where they were employed while on a mental health leave. The employee used their staff badge to gain access to methadone, which was then used to end their life.

DISCUSSION AND RESOURCES

A contributing factor in this incident was the employee's continued access to controlled substances in secure areas of the hospital because their security badge remained active during the period of leave.



Diversion Prevention Strategy

Remove access (e.g., inactivate electronic passkeys) to medications, including controlled substances, when staff are terminated or on leave.



Tools developed to support hospitals and other facilities in identifying and reducing the risk of diversion within their organizations include:

- Pan-Canadian Diversion Risk Assessment Tool²
- [Framework for Improving the Safety and Security of Controlled Substances in Hospital High-Risk Areas](#)
- [ASHP Guidelines on Preventing Diversion of Controlled Substances](#)

Guidance in these resources can support a shift to a culture of safety; the aim is to identify gaps in medication-use systems and to also promote improved wellness support for health care providers.

REFERENCES

1. Unauthorized access to methadone in a community pharmacy contributes to death. ISMP Can Saf Bull. 2020 [cited 2024 Nov 11];20(9):1-5. Available from: <https://ismpcanada.ca/bulletin/unauthorized-access-to-methadone-in-a-community-pharmacy-contributes-to-death/>
2. Pan-Canadian diversion risk assessment tool. Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists (Ontario Branch), HumanEra, and ISMP Canada; 2022 Sep [cited 2024 Nov 11]. (Available upon request to mssa@ismpcanada.ca)