



UnityHealth

GP surgeries in Brill, Long Crendon, Thame, Chinnor and Princes Risborough.

A day in the life of a Unity Health dispenser at Brill and Long Crendon surgeries



Dispensing isn't all about sticking labels on to medication boxes. A lot happens before we get to that point in the process. Our dispensing day generally starts at 8:15am. This is when dispensers arrive and open up the dispensary.



Our delivery driver then appears with lots of blue plastic totes ready for us to unpack. Before we can do anything we have a few checks to do. We check the fridge and room temperatures and log the results. We also review and action any urgent tasks from the GPs. Unpacking the totes can take some time. Each drug has to be checked off against the invoice before being placed on the shelf. Our dispensary shelves are arranged in alphabetical order so each medication has an allocated space. When restocking the shelves we check the expiry date of the medication we have just received and rotate the stock so the best dates are always at the bottom of the pile. Most medications have long expiry dates, at least a year or two so luckily hardly anything goes to waste. We have a system which notifies us of any medication that is due to expire each month so it can be removed.

The dispensary team action all online and paper prescription requests. Throughout the day we have multiple trips to the letterbox. We have a list of checks we have to perform before issuing a prescription. If the medication request meets the criteria we can go ahead and issue, creating a prescription. It then prints out in the dispensary. If there are any queries to do with the medication request, maybe it has previously been prescribed as an acute medication, these requests have to be passed on to the GP to action. This is all done electronically using our medicines management system. This is to protect, you as patients and all the staff working in the dispensary. A GP has overall responsibility for everything that is prescribed and dispensed in the dispensary.

Once we have our pile of printed prescriptions we then order all the stock. We have one main supplier but also use some companies to source out of stock items or medical appliances. We order through a website, a bit like doing online grocery shopping but it takes a lot longer. Each item has to be typed in to the search engine and added to the basket. We try to order as much as we can before 11am as readily available items will then be delivered that same afternoon. If something is showing as out of stock we then telephone different suppliers to see if we can source it a different way.

Before we can dispense any items, the prescription must be signed by a GP. Once signed we can then get on with dispensing! Labels have to be generated for each medication box and also a bag label. During dispensing we make multiple checks including: drug name, form – this could be tablets, capsules, patches etc., strength and quantity. We also check the directions on the label, match what is documented on the prescription and have the correct name on them. Once items have been dispensed they are placed in a basket for our accuracy checking dispenser to check and bag up. When all this is complete, the medication bags are placed in reception for patients to collect. If any items are missing the bag will be kept in dispensary for us to complete the prescription. It is really important that throughout this process interruptions are minimised to ensure the dispenser can focus on performing all the checks safely. This is why we have a phone list so we can help you with your queries during an allocated time when staff are not performing essential dispensing checks.

The process above repeats itself multiple times a day; there is never a moment to feel bored as there is always something to do! We get another delivery from our main supplier in the afternoon and generally 2 additional deliveries each day from different suppliers. Of course around all this we need to action all the acute (urgent/one off) prescriptions that a GP prescribes during their clinics. We also need to monitor tasks from the GPs and other colleagues, prepare dosette boxes, clean and perform dispensary checks.

On average we dispense 2000 scripts and 5000 items per dispensing site each month. We all love being a part of your community. Our favourite part of our role is getting to connect with our patients and helping in the best way we can. Thank you for all your support!