

Hospital pharmacy technician involvement with controlled drug management: A survey of Australian hospital pharmacy departments

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INTRODUCTION

The legislation governing the handling, storage and transport of controlled drugs (CDs) differs between Australian states/territories. Some Australian hospital pharmacy departments utilise technicians to perform CD-related tasks, however the prevalence of this practice is unknown.¹

Undertaking CD-related tasks can be time consuming, and does not require any clinical expertise. When pharmacists undertake these activities, it may be to the detriment of direct patient care provision.

Delegating these roles to trained pharmacy technicians may liberate pharmacists to complete other tasks requiring clinical judgement.

AIM

To describe the engagement of hospital pharmacy technicians (HPTs) in handling, storage and transporting of CDs within Australian hospitals.

METHODS

Study design:

Cross sectional survey of Australian hospital pharmacy departments.

Questionnaire design:

- Relevant drugs and poisons authorities confirmed the CD management roles HPTs can perform in their jurisdiction.
- Participants were only asked about roles authorised within their state or territory.
- Questionnaire was circulated to the Directors of Pharmacy at each private/public hospital.
- Only one response per hospital was requested.

DISCUSSION

- NSW and SA have the most restrictive CD regulations, only permitting HPTs to assist with ordering stock (Figure 1), limiting task delegation.
- More hospitals utilise HPTs in transporting CDs than with handling and storage tasks (Figure 2).
- HPTs can order CDs in every Australian state/territory, however 43% of hospitals do not utilise HPTs for this task. Increased delegation of this role to HPTs should be explored.
- Utilisation of HPTs as the second signature, alongside a nurse or pharmacist, in CD registers can satisfy both institutional and legal documentation requirements.

RESULTS

Overall, 47 of the 273 questionnaire links circulated were completed (17% response rate) (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographics

	n = 47 (%)
State	
NSW	14 (30)
VIC	14 (30)
QLD	5 (11)
WA	4 (9)
NT	3 (6)
SA	3 (6)
ACT	2 (4)
TAS	2 (4)
Rurality	
Major city	28 (60)
Inner regional	9 (19)
Outer regional	8 (17)
Remote	0 (0)
Very remote	2 (4)
Type of hospital	
Public	39 (83)
Private	5 (11)
Mixed	3 (6)

Figure 1: Australian state/territories that permit hospital pharmacy technicians to:

- Record entries in a CD register and
- Transport CDs within a hospital and
- Conduct a stocktake of CDs

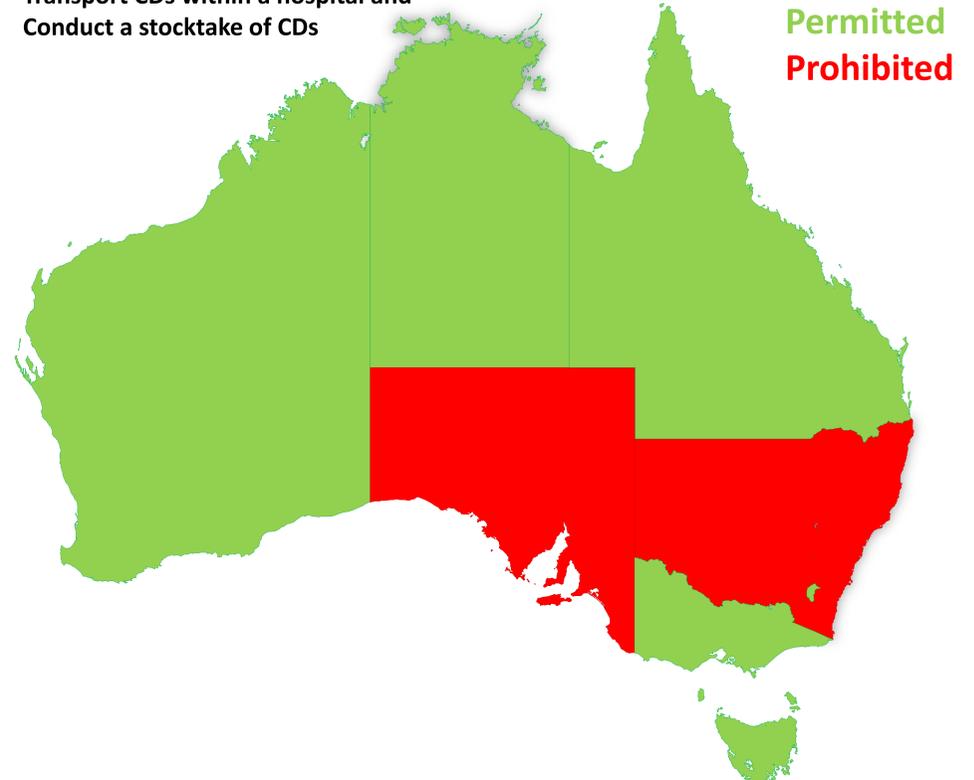
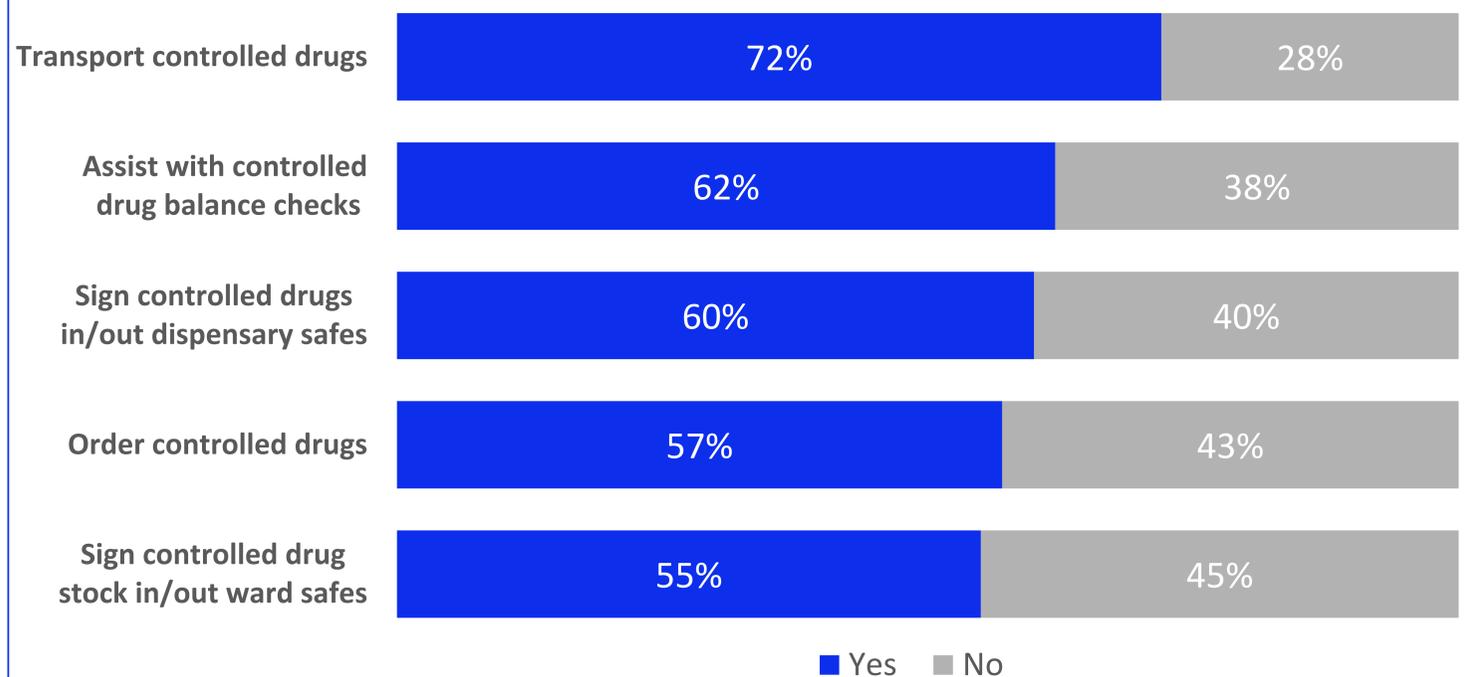


Figure 2: Uptake of controlled drug roles by hospital pharmacy technicians in hospitals where they can legally perform the tasks



Pharmacy technicians are **not** fully utilised in handling, storing or transporting controlled drugs in Australian hospitals.

CONCLUSION

There is potential for further delegation of controlled drug management tasks to pharmacy technicians, to facilitate pharmacists spending more time on direct patient care roles that require clinical judgement.

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