

How to train your pharmacy department

A COVID-19 mass vaccination success story



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Background

In mid-2021, high demands for the COVID-19 vaccines led to establishment of mass vaccination centres (MVCs). One NSW MVC aimed for 10,000 vaccinations per day. To achieve this target, the MVC's pharmacy department employed staff from both pharmacy and non-pharmacy backgrounds including nursing, dental, medical, scientists, university health students and non-clinical staff.

This presented a unique challenge as majority were unfamiliar with pharmacy dispensing practices. The pharmacy department used an electronic dispensing system to record all vaccine activity including cold-chain management and vaccine preparation. Importantly, the dispensing system also associated each dose with vaccine names, batches and expiry dates to allow for integration with the Australian Immunisation Register.

Objective

To rapidly train staff with a wide variety of work experiences to proficiently use the pharmacy dispensing system for managing and preparing vaccines.

Method

A pharmacist employed as a digital health coach developed a pharmacist-led digital health training program. This program was used to train staff working in the MVC's pharmacy department. Key topics covered in the program included:

- ❖ Privacy and cybersecurity modules mandated by NSW Health
- ❖ Use of the pharmacy dispensing system to document cold-chain management, stock transfers, wastage, vaccine batches and expiries, and vaccine preparation records
- ❖ Use of the Five Faces vaccine management system to track daily number of vaccine doses required

Quick reference guides and videos were also developed by pharmacists for additional support.

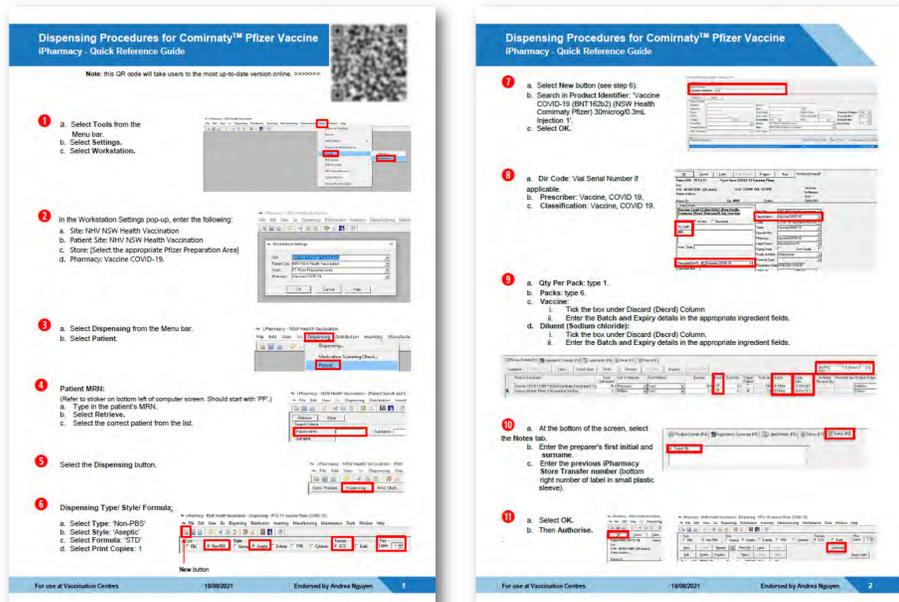


Figure 1: Quick reference guide demonstrating how to dispense the Comirnaty™ Pfizer vaccine using iPharmacy.

Staff were assessed by pharmacist trainers before being granted access to the dispensing system.

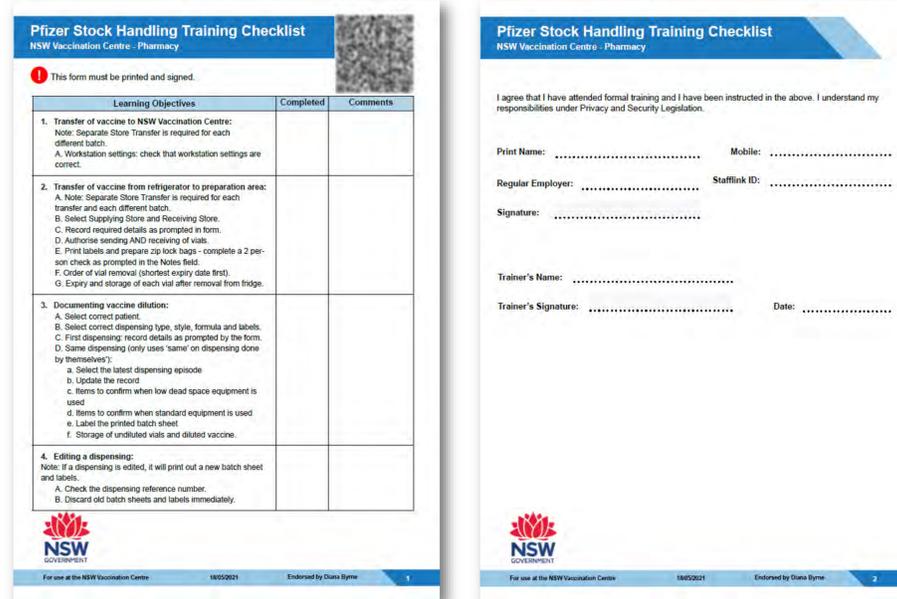


Figure 2: Training checklist used by pharmacist trainers to competency assess staff on handling the Comirnaty™ Pfizer vaccine before granting them access to the dispensing system.

Evaluation

The digital health coach with one other pharmacist successfully implemented this program to train 238 staff over five months. This allowed the pharmacy department to exceed the MVC's target and prepare over 10,000 doses a day. To date, the MVC's pharmacy team has prepared over 1.6 million COVID-19 vaccines.

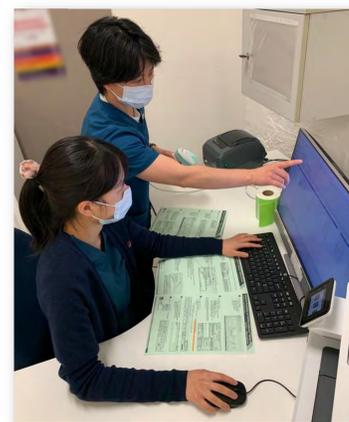


Figure 3: Pharmacist trainer delivering training to staff member.

Discussion

The program was later adapted to train staff to manage and prepare other COVID-19 vaccines as they became registered in Australia. Staff developed valuable dispensing skills that were transferable to an inpatient hospital setting. The role of the pharmacist digital health coach was invaluable in creating a pharmacist-led digital health training model to efficiently upskill a non-pharmacy workforce on pharmacy dispensing practices.

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