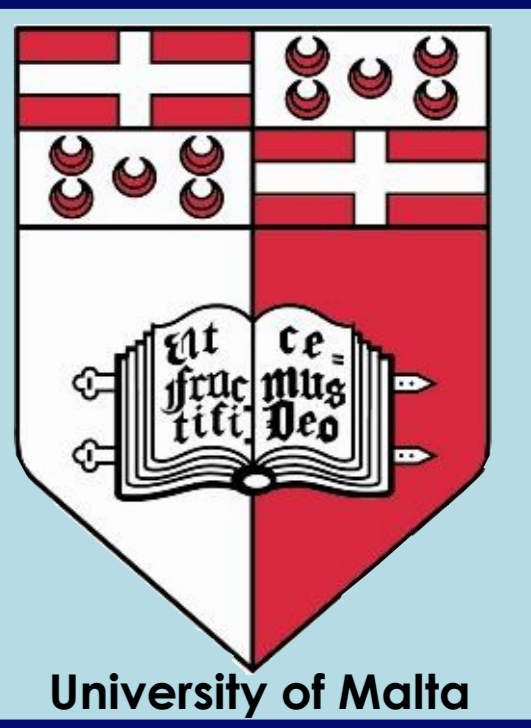


Critical Analysis of the Dispensing Process at a General Hospital Pharmacy



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Introduction

The dispensing process is often underestimated; if the process fails the consequences can be significant. Mater Dei Hospital (MDH) is Malta's major acute public general hospital, and it incorporates the main pharmacy on the Island. On average 400 prescriptions are filled daily from Mater Dei Out-Patient Pharmacy. It is manned by 5 pharmacists and 6 pharmacy technicians.

Aims

- To identify strengths and weaknesses within the present out-patient dispensing system at a public general hospital
- To recommend alternative processes for a more user-friendly system

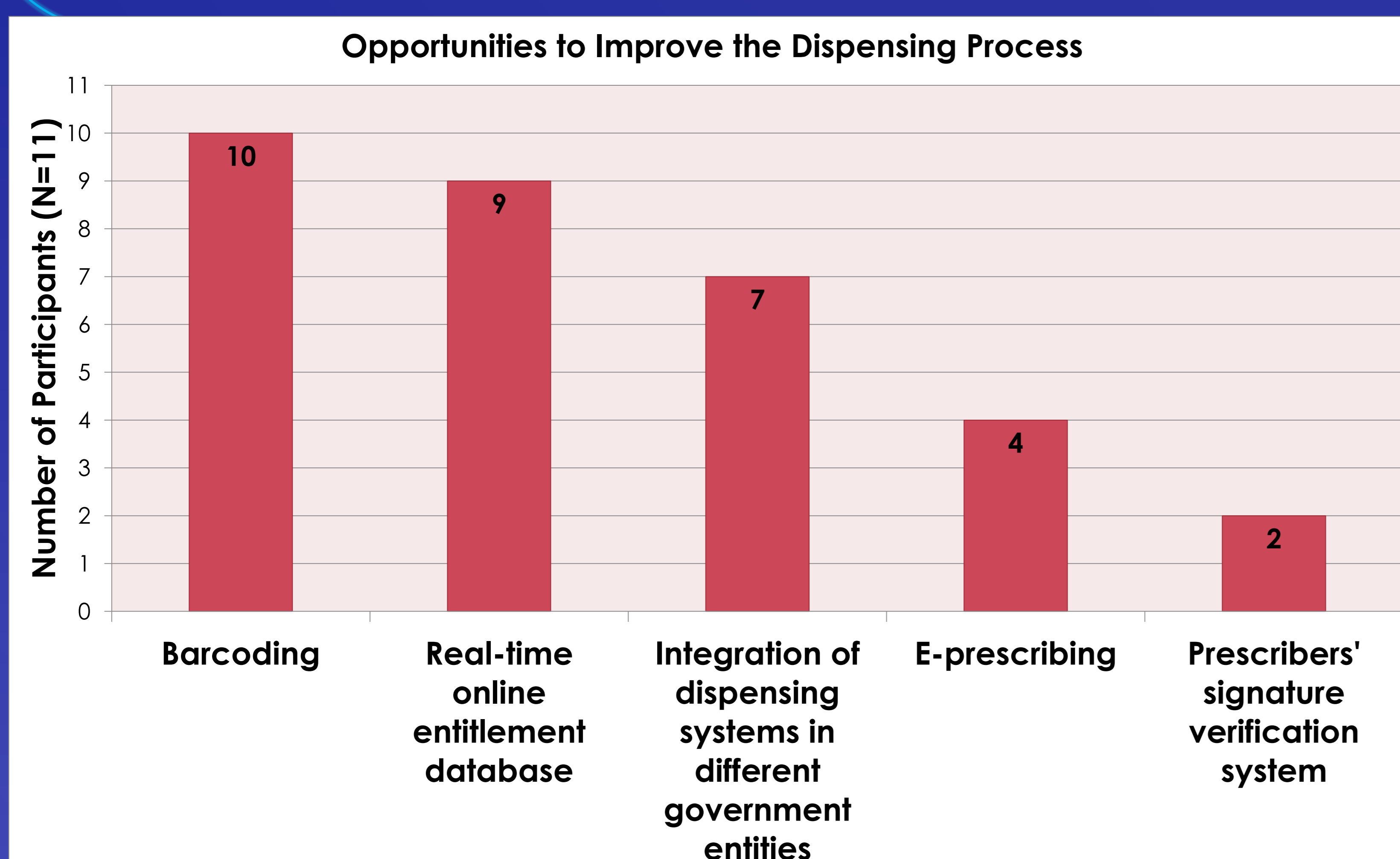


Method

- The approval to carry out the study at MDH pharmacy was obtained from the hospital's administration.
- An action research and a qualitative approach was adopted. Dispensing of medicines from the out-patient pharmacy was checked against Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Non compliance was documented in a Deviation Report.
- A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis that may influence the dispensing process was carried out in discussion with all pharmacists (n=5) and pharmacy technicians (n=6) working at the out-patient pharmacy.
- SOPs on existing procedures were reviewed in line with the feedback obtained. These were submitted to the pharmacy Quality Assurance Section and Management for further evaluation and implementation.

Results

- The dispensing process is influenced by both internal and external factors to the pharmacy set-up.
- Major strengths identified within the present pharmacy set-up are the availability of IT systems (n=11) for record keeping and stock control, and access to clinical information for reference purposes (n=8).
- Limitations to the dispensing process which were highlighted include multitasking (n=8) in order to meet varying demands from different patients at the same time; and an environment which does not support confidentiality (n=8) due to overcrowding. It was also found that in trying to encourage rational and safe use of medicine, the current system has an overload of bureaucratic procedures. These are perceived to limit pharmacists' professional discretion (n=5).
- Current technological developments offer opportunities to better current pharmaceutical services.



Conclusion

The dispensing process must be given proper attention in order to provide improved pharmaceutical care. Pharmacists are duty bound to ensure that good dispensing practices are adhered to at all times. Pharmacists' knowledge in medicine use and management is widely recognized. However, their potential contribution to public health care is often underestimated. The introduction of some flexibility to protocols will empower pharmacists to use their professional judgement during the dispensing process.

References

World Health Organization (WHO) and International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP). Developing Pharmacy Practice. A Focus on Patient Care. The Hague; WHO and FIP: 2006.