



Pharmacist Spotlight: Pharmacy Workplace & Well-being – Building Safer Systems for Better Outcomes

Healthcare Providers Service Organization (HPSO), in collaboration with CNA, has published our CNA/HPSO [Pharmacist Professional Liability Exposure Claim Report: 3rd Edition](#) (3rd Edition Report). The report includes statistical data and case scenarios from CNA claim files, along with information on where to access risk management resources designed to help pharmacists reduce their professional liability exposures and improve patient safety.

You may access the complete report, and additional Risk Control Spotlights, at: hpso.com/pharmacistclaimreport.

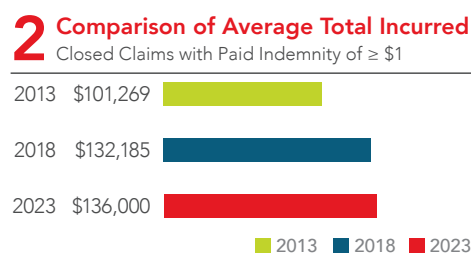
This Pharmacist Spotlight focuses on a complex topic that impacts pharmacists, pharmacy personnel, workforce dynamics, quality of care, patient safety, and the ability to effectively defend insureds in the event of a claim or lawsuit: **Pharmacy Workplace and Well-being**.

Regardless of the type of setting, location or specialty, the pharmacist's role and practice are evolving and expanding. In today's healthcare environment, not only are pharmacists responsible for dispensing medications, but also for delivering clinical services such as immunizations, medication therapy management, and test-to-treat programs. The expansion of pharmacists' clinical and operational responsibilities has increased workplace demands, often requiring more complex decisions and patient care activities without adequate staff support, making workforce well-being a critical component of patient safety.

The Modern Pharmacy Workplace: High Demand, High Risk

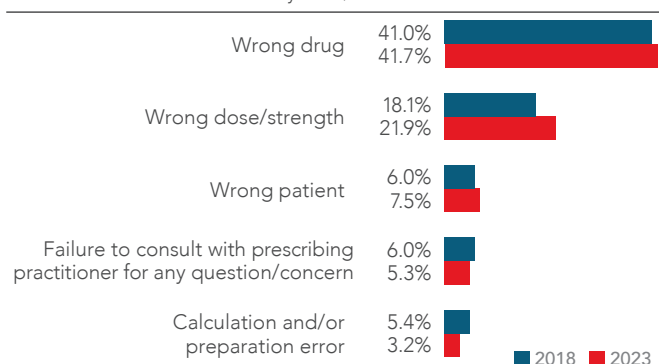
Working in today's pharmacy environment, particularly with expanded roles, places significant demands on pharmacists, both professionally and personally. According to the 3rd Edition Report, professional liability claim severity is increasing, with the average total incurred (indemnity plus claim expenses) now \$136,000.

The analysis of the professional liability claims in the 3rd Edition Report found that dispensing the wrong drug and dispensing the wrong dose/strength remain the top allegations asserted against pharmacists (**Figure 8**).



8 Distribution of Closed Claims by Top 5 Most Common Allegations

Closed Claims with Paid Indemnity of ≥ \$1



These claims often occurred while the pharmacist was working in a highly demanding environment and the following factors were present:

- Interruptions and multitasking
- High prescription volume
- Staffing constraints
- Workflow variability

Ultimately, when the system is strained, the pharmacist absorbs the risk both personally and professionally.

Pharmacist Well-being and Resilience Among the Pharmacist Workforce

The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP), the Accreditation Council for Pharmacist Education (ACPE), the American Pharmacists Association (APhA), the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP), and the National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations (NASPA) worked collaboratively to address issues and concerns associated with job stress, moral distress, work overload, burnout, and level of control within the pharmacy profession. The following resources can be utilized by pharmacists, pharmacy business owners, and pharmacy managers/leaders to improve working conditions affecting the mental health and well-being of pharmacists and pharmacy personnel.

- [Well-being and Workplace Reports and Research](#)
- [Enhancing Well-Being and Resilience Among the Pharmacist Workforce: A National Consensus Conference](#)
- [Pharmacy Well-being & Workplace Policy Explorer and Comparison Tool](#)

Well-being and Patient Safety Are Interdependent

Pharmacists, pharmacy business owners, and pharmacy managers/leaders need to reconsider their approach regarding patient safety. The approach to patient safety should include a focus on the personal and professional well-being of pharmacists and how it can affect patient safety.

Reducing Burnout Through Work Design and System Improvement

Burnout in pharmacy practice is frequently associated with workplace conditions that affect concentration, decision-making, and consistency in care delivery. When pharmacists experience systemic stressors of a poorly designed workflow process, frequent interruptions, unclear or changing employment expectations, inadequate staffing, and administrative burden, they may begin to feel cognitive overload and fatigue. In turn, these conditions may increase the likelihood of process breakdowns, errors, and near-misses.

Designing policies and procedures to support patient safety and current practice can help mitigate these risks. Standardizing high-risk processes, incorporating safety technologies such as barcode verification, reducing unnecessary process variation, utilizing pharmacy technicians to their level of training, and embedding safeguards such as dosing defaults and clinical alerts for high-risk drugs and unexpected dosages can improve workflow consistency and reduce reliance on the pharmacist's memory in high-volume environments. These measures also help create a more structured practice setting in which pharmacists can focus attention on patient care responsibilities.

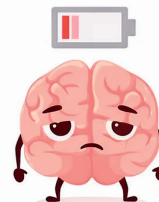


PHARMACIST BURNOUT



SYSTEMIC STRESSORS

- Excessive workload and staffing shortages
- Administrative and documentation burden
- Moral distress and role conflict
- Poorly designed or fragmented digital systems
- Limited professional and clinical demands
- Conflicting commercial clinical demands



RELIEF PATHWAYS

- Equitable staffing and workload regulation
- Participatory, supportive leadership
- Human-centered technology design
- Recognition and peer support
- Professional autonomy and clinical empowerment
- Integration of well-being into policy, ethics, and accreditation

[Pharmacist burnout: from coping to system accountability in the medication-use process.](#)¹

¹ Esteban Zavalet-Monestel, Lars-Arke Soderlund, Josep Mari Guix-Segura, Jaustin Mora-Jimenez and Sebastian Arguedas-Chacon. Front. Public Health. Vol 13, 2025. Original article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).

An important first step for pharmacists, pharmacy owners, and pharmacy leaders is to periodically assess workplace design and workflow processes to identify operational vulnerabilities. Well-designed systems support routine decision-making, clarify responsibilities, and reduce unnecessary complexity. Conversely, poorly designed systems may contribute to inefficiency, ambiguity, fatigue, and increased exposure to patient safety events.

UTILIZING PHARMACY TECHNICIANS

Below are resources that support utilizing pharmacy technicians to their level of training:

- [APhA HoD Policy Statement on Expanding Pharmacy Technician Roles](#)
- [APhA Policy on Pharmacy Tech Education](#)
- [Roles and impact of pharmacy technicians on hospital wards: a systematic review](#)
- [Roles for Pharmacy Technicians in Medication Reconciliation During Transitions of Care](#)

Creating a Culture of Safety and Support

A safe pharmacy practice environment requires more than written policies alone. It also depends upon an organizational culture that supports reporting, learning, and continuous improvement. [A just culture framework](#) can assist organizations in distinguishing human error from reckless conduct while promoting fair accountability and system-based analysis of adverse events.

Within this type of environment, pharmacists and staff are more likely to report errors, near-misses, and process concerns, allowing organizations to identify contributing factors and implement corrective action. Transparent communication, structured incident review, and root cause analysis are important components of this process. These efforts can strengthen operational reliability, improve patient safety, and support a more sustainable practice environment.

Policies & Procedures as a Foundation for Well-being

Policies and procedures are often viewed primarily as compliance tools. However, within the pharmacy practice setting, they also serve an important operational and risk management function by establishing a framework for consistent, safe, and reliable care delivery. When effectively designed and implemented, policies and procedures provide clarity regarding daily work expectations, reduce reliance on memory in high-pressure situations, define roles and escalation pathways, and support training, onboarding, and competency assessment.

In addition, well-constructed policies and procedures can promote a more stable practice environment by reducing ambiguity and helping pharmacists and staff understand the appropriate process to follow when routine operations are disrupted or an unexpected event occurs. In this way, these documents support not only operational consistency, but also a workplace culture in which expectations, responsibilities, and response pathways are clearly understood.

Visit [HPSO.com](https://www.hpsoc.com) to learn more about how compliance with well-written and maintained [policies and procedures](#) reduces variation, embeds safety technology (e.g., barcode verification, clinical decision support), raises staff competency, preserves records for patient safety, error investigations and litigation, and is consistent with a culture of safety and quality in the delivery of healthcare services.

The American Pharmacists Association (APhA) launched the [Pharmacy Well-being & Workplace Policy Explorer and Comparison Tool](#) - an interactive map that provides state-by-state comparison of laws and regulations that shape the pharmacy workplace and well-being. This tool highlights pharmacy staffing and workload, breaks and rest periods, working conditions and safety, and pharmacy technician scope and responsibility by each state.

Measuring What Matters: Workplace and Safety Metrics

To sustain improvement efforts, pharmacies should measure both patient safety indicators and system performance. Meaningful metrics may include the use of two patient identifiers at the point-of-sale, barcode verification compliance, the frequency of workflow overrides, near-miss reporting rates, and the timeliness of corrective action implementation. Monitoring these measures can help organizations determine whether processes are being followed as intended, identify where breakdowns are occurring, and assess opportunities for improvement.

Practical Strategies to Improve Pharmacy Well-being

Organizations can take a number of practical steps to strengthen pharmacy workplace well-being while also reducing patient safety risk. These efforts begin with standardizing high-risk workflows for dispensing, verification, and counseling and incorporating safeguards such as the use of two patient identifiers and barcode scanning. Reducing cognitive load is also an important consideration. Limiting unnecessary manual steps, using system defaults and alerts appropriately, and minimizing reliance on memory or multitasking can help support more consistent performance in high-demand settings.

Additional strategies include strengthening training and competency programs so that all staff understand procedures, role expectations, and escalation pathways. Providing ongoing education, tracking competency, and ensuring access to clinical and operational resources can further support sound decision-making. Equally important is fostering a just culture in which reporting is encouraged, system issues are examined objectively, and unsafe practices are addressed promptly and consistently. Together, these strategies can help create a practice environment that supports pharmacists while promoting safer care.

PHARMACIST SPOTLIGHTS ON RISK MANAGEMENT

For case studies, risk control strategies and more, see additional Pharmacist Spotlights related to:

- [Defending Your License](#)
- [Documentation](#)
- [Safety Culture](#)
- [Policies and Procedures](#)
- [De-escalation and Crisis Management](#)
- [Workplace Issues and Well-being](#)

Visit www.hpsoc.com/pharmacistclaimreport



The Legal and Professional Dimension

Workplace systems also have important legal and professional implications. In the event of a claim, well-documented policies, training records, and evidence of competency can support the defense of the pharmacist and organization. Conversely, the absence of clear procedures, outdated policies, or failure to follow established processes may increase professional liability exposure. Organizations should be prepared to demonstrate that procedures were current, staff were trained and competent, and pharmacy processes were implemented consistently in practice.

Conclusion: Designing Workplaces That Protect Patients and Pharmacists

Pharmacy practice is a high-risk environment in which even minor process failures may have significant consequences. Accordingly, patient safety efforts should not focus solely on pharmacists' individual vigilance. In many cases, errors and near-misses are influenced by system design, workflow inefficiencies, and operational inconsistency. A safer and more sustainable practice environment depends upon structured workflows, reduced complexity, and workplace systems that support pharmacists in meeting patient care demands safely and consistently.

When pharmacy workplaces are designed to reduce ambiguity, support sound decision-making, and promote reliable processes, they are better positioned to protect both patients and the professionals who serve them. In this respect, workplace well-being, patient safety, and risk mitigation should be understood as closely connected priorities within pharmacy practice.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

- [Actions of the 2024 American Pharmacists Association House of Delegates, Orlando, FL, March 22 - 25, 2024](#)
- [APhA Policy Statements on Automation & Safe Technologies: Automation and Technology in Pharmacy Practice](#)
- [House of Delegates Policy and Procedures Manual](#)
- [ISMP Targeted Medication Safety Best Practices for Hospitals](#)
- [Pharmacist's Role in Medication Safety](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration – Self Care for Health Care Workers Modules](#)
- [Well-being Index for Pharmacy Personnel](#)
- [Zentz R, Reiner G. Responding to Medication Errors Using a Just Culture Approach in Pharmacy Practice. Pharmacy Today, Oct 2023. p 46-58.](#)



A portion of this information was excerpted from HPSO and CNA's full report, *Pharmacist Professional Liability Exposure Claim Report: 3rd Edition*.
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In addition to this publication, CNA and Healthcare Providers Service Organization (HPSO) have produced numerous studies and articles that provide useful risk control information on topics relevant to pharmacists, as well as information relating to pharmacist insurance, at www.hpso.com. These publications are also available by contacting CNA at 1.866.262.0540 or at www.cna.com.

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