

## New technology can increase patient safety



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Technological advancements such as bar code applications can be used during the dispensing process to reduce medication errors. Unfortunately, many pharmacists are unaware of the various technologies available that can enhance patient safety.

### Case

During the filling of a prescription for 60 ranitidine 150 mg tablets, a pharmacy technician retrieved a stock bottle of Novo-Ranitidine 150 mg and began to count the tablets with the use of an electronic tablet counter. After pouring approximately 15 tablets into the unit, the technician was interrupted by a telephone call.

Meanwhile, a second technician, who was unaware that ranitidine tablets were in the tray, began to count 100 Apo-Atenol 50 mg by pouring the tablets on top of the 15 ranitidine tablets. As a result, 100 atenolol tablets together with 15 ranitidine tablets were poured into a vial and labelled as Apo-Atenol 50 mg tablets. Upon checking the prescription, the pharmacist did not detect the error.

Five days later, the patient called the pharmacy to report the presence of a number of unidentified tablets in his vial of atenolol tablets. He expressed concern that he might have taken some of these tablets.

### Possible contributing factors

- The technician was interrupted while counting the ranitidine tablets.
- The user of the counting device could not see the tray and its contents when being used to count tablets.
- The second technician failed to check the tray before beginning to count the atenolol tablets.
- Both Novo-Ranitidine 150 mg and Apo-Atenol 50 mg

are white, round tablets, making it difficult to distinguish between them at a glance.

### Recommendations

- Take steps to minimize the number of interruptions in the dispensary. Consider investing in an automated telephone system, thereby reducing the number of telephone calls to the dispensary.
- Educate staff to visually check the contents of the counting tray before using. After counting the tablets/capsules, visually check the content of the tray to identify the presence of any incorrect tablets/capsules.
- When checking prescriptions, open the vial to confirm its contents.
- Consider investing in a tablet counting device which employs bar coding technology, such as the AccuCount™ Pharmacy Scale.\* The contents of the tray can be seen as the tablets are being counted. Therefore, the presence of any foreign tablets can be detected. As an added benefit, the tablets can be poured directly into the patient vial, thereby eliminating cross-contamination. ■

*\*The author does not endorse or promote a specific product. The AccuCount Pharmacy Scale is only one option. The author encourages the reader to investigate others. AccuCount™ Pharmacy Scale is a trademark of McKesson.*

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