

DRUG DIVERSION EDUCATION

A crucial component of prevention.

Those who work in healthcare settings have the obligation and privilege to maintain the highest safety standards possible for their patients. It is well documented that up to 10% of nurses, as well as other healthcare providers, will suffer from addiction of some sort during their careerⁱ. Addiction and impairment are often associated with diversion of controlled substances. This is mainly due to the availability of controlled drugs in healthcare settings and opportunities for them to be diverted. To combat this issue, healthcare facilities tend to focus on preventing and detecting drug diversion, with education not being a top priority. Often when education is provided the objectives are focused on what happened and what not to do. Rather than the focus being on prior diversion events and unacceptable practices, drug diversion education must be proactive and tailored for all employees. A proactive approach to diversion prevention and detection is crucial to the success of an education program.

Healthcare providers are compassionate and caring individuals who are in tune to the needs of their patients, but they are not always in tune to the signs and symptoms of addiction or diversion regarding their peers. Studies show that early detection and intervention are the building blocks of a successful recoveryⁱⁱ. Providing drug diversion education and awareness to those in leadership and the front lines is the first step to early intervention, as well as maintaining a safe environment for patients and healthcare providers.

Who needs to know about diversion/impairment? What do they need to know about diversion? These are the two primary questions asked when developing an education plan.

Who needs to know about drug diversion/impairment?

The answer is everyone – clinical and non-clinical. It is important that all are aware that this is a priority for your facility.

What does the team need to know about drug diversion/impairment?

- Signs and symptoms
- How to report suspicious activity or behaviors
 - Chain of command or anonymously
- What they can do to minimize opportunity
 - Follow standards and policies
- Drug Diversion Team roles and responsibilities
- The health and wellness resources available to employees

Signs and Symptoms of Impairment:

Work Changes	Behavior Changes	Physical Changes
Increased absences	Mood swings	Pupil changes
Team member complaints	Increased or decreased energy	Slurred speech
Incomplete documentation	Lies or forgets parts of conversations	Tremors
Only does what is necessary	Complains of pain	Sleepiness

Increased medication errors	Poor concentration	Sweaty
Patient complaints	Always wore short sleeved shirts, now long sleeved	Weight loss
Decreased interaction with peers	Talks about a new set of friends	Disheveled appearance
Leaves the unit frequently during shift	Paranoia	Tearful eyes

Signs of Diversion:

Automated Dispense Cabinet	Documentation	Behavior Changes
Dispenses controlled drugs at beginning and end of shift	Frequent waste of total dose dispensed	Goes to restroom or locker room after dispensing medication
Frequent controlled drug count discrepancies	Patient’s medication administration record shows patient receiving more medication on certain shifts	Keeps personal bag close by
Controlled drug and acetaminophen or ibuprofen dispensed at same time	Pain score trends vary greatly from one shift to another	Offers to medicate other nurse’s patients more frequently
IV and oral controlled drugs dispensed at same time	Medication that was dispensed is not documented as being administered	Looks around when dispensing medication

A quality drug diversion prevention and detection program should include education highlighting substance use disorder as a disease, rather than portraying the individual diverting in a negative manner. Drug diversion education should empower and encourage employees to report suspicious behavior, which may lead to earlier detection and a more favorable recovery. [Contact the Trexin healthcare advisory team](#) to assist with your diversion education program needs.

What you do today may save a life tomorrow.



This TIP was written by Denise Hickey. Denise welcomes comments and discussion on this topic and can be reached at denise.hickey@trexin.com.

ⁱ [Drug Diversion: Education is key to prevention and detection | Visante \(visanteinc.com\)](#)

ⁱⁱ [Preventing Diversion of Controlled Substances \(ashp.org\)](#)