Certified athletic trainers routinely deal with both over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription medications in the performance of their jobs. It is important to ensure that medical and legal guidelines are followed when medications are dispensed. To ensure compliance and continuity of care, it is recommended that policies and procedures be established for athletic training facilities for both OTC and prescription drugs. In recent years, there have been several highly public cases reported in the media in which prescription medications were improperly dispensed in the athletic training room setting. This can create legal-liability concerns for sports-medicine staff and expose student athletes to increased risks. The University of Georgia Athletic Association (UGAA) has established both OTC-medication protocols and prescription-drug-program policies and procedures. The purpose of this article is to share our experience in managing medications in the athletic training room.

**Key Points**

- Certified athletic trainers routinely deal with both over-the-counter and prescription medications in the performance of their jobs.
- It is important to ensure that medical and legal guidelines are followed when medications are dispensed.
- It is recommended that policies and procedures for dispensing medication be established for athletic training facilities.

**OTC-Medication Protocols**

OTC medications are commonly distributed in the athletic training room. In order to ensure continuity of care with regard to medication distribution, an OTC-medication protocol is used. It should be noted that any OTC-medication protocol is strictly a recommendation and is not a replacement for consultation with and treatment by a physician. Our protocols were written in conjunction with our team physicians and approved by both the head team physician and the director of sports medicine. Before dispensing any OTC medications, we emphasize that our athletic training staff obtain a SAMPLE history. This encompasses questioning the student athlete regarding

- Signs and symptoms
- Allergies
- Medications
- Pertinent past history
- Last oral intake
- Events leading to the injury/illness

When questioning an athlete about the use of any medications, either OTC or prescription, we also screen for any nutritional supplements. After obtaining a SAMPLE medical history, we take baseline vital signs of blood pressure, pulse, and temperature. Peak expiratory-flow rate, lung auscultation, and body weight might also be assessed.
Protocol for Cold/Sore Throat

Screening Questions
- Nasal drainage (color, duration)?
- Sore throat? Difficulty swallowing?
- Hydration and appetite?
- Exposure to strep throat? Other illness exposure? Past history?
- History of mononucleosis or allergies?
- Sneezing?
- Coughing? Productive cough (color, odor)?
- Ear pain?

Physical Findings
- Fever
- Swollen tonsils
- Tender/Swollen lymph nodes (palpations)
- Appearance of patient

Treatment for Adult Patients With Temperature $\geq 100^\circ$ and Pulse $< 100$
- Oranyl Plus (a.m.) and/or Diphen (p.m. *Note: Might cause drowsiness*)
- Gargling for sore throat with salt water
- Robitussin® DM or guaifenesin DM and/or Medikoff® Drops for cough
- Bed rest
- Push fluids (electrolytes, water, juices)

Callback
- Persistent symptoms for 5–7 days
- Sore throat for more than 5–7 days
- Productive cough with fever of 100°
- New symptoms

Each protocol (see the sidebar) includes screening questions, physical findings, recommended treatment, callback criteria, and physician-referral criteria. The dispensing of any medication is recorded when it is issued. Furthermore, OTC medications are always issued in single-dose packaging. Each student athlete is instructed to follow the guidelines on the package when taking any OTC medications. OTC medications are stored in a designated cabinet in the athletic training room marked with OTC-medication signs. Each medication is identified with a placard reviewing the protocol (Figure 1). The placards are color-coded, and any medication that might be banned by either the NCAA or the United States Olympic Committee Agency is identified with a red placard.

Prescription-Drug-Program Policies and Procedures

The goals for our prescription-drug program at UGAA are listed in the sidebar on the next page. Before the beginning of each school year, the head team physician and members of the athletic training staff meet to develop a prescription-drug formulary. The prescription-drug formulary determines which medications are stored in the athletic training facility medical offices to treat UGAA student athletes. All team physicians must be licensed to practice medicine in the State of Georgia and must be currently registered with the DEA. In order to dispense prescription medications from the athletic training facility, the head team physician and primary-care and orthopedic team physicians should have additional DEA certificates listing the physical address of the UGAA athletic training facility medical offices. The University of Georgia uses SportPharm as the team pharmacy. Because SportPharm is based in California, the SportPharm pharmacist and team pharmacy through SportPharm are also licensed by the Board of Pharmacy in the State of Georgia. They also maintain a current license as an FDA repackager of drugs. Our policies and procedures state that all staff athletic trainers must be certified by the NATA/BOC and licensed by the Georgia Board of Athletic Trainers. Accordingly, these individuals can help the team physician as medical-staff assistants under the protocol with ordering, receiving, storing, disposing of, and keeping records on prescription drugs. Copies of DEA licenses, certificates, and credentials for all staff members are kept in the prescription-drug-program policy-and-procedure manual.
The head team physician is responsible for compliance with the prescription-drug program. The assistant team physicians and staff athletic trainers under delegated authority and protocol are also responsible for compliance. The sports-medicine team communicates and works together to ensure compliance. All team physicians sign an agent-of-record statement authorizing certain staff athletic trainers to assist with medical-treatment protocols. Each academic year, all student athletes are asked to give written permission to the authorized staff athletic trainers to act as their agents to forward a prescription request by their team or personal physician, call the team pharmacy to request a refill of a previously prescribed medication, and receive, store, transport, and secure prescription medication on their behalf. Furthermore, the head team physician and assistant team physician sign a pharmacy authorization statement for authorized staff athletic trainers giving them permission to forward prescription medication requests and call the team pharmacy to restock formulary drugs according to their directions and established protocol.

**Goals of the UGAA Prescription-Drug Program**

To ensure the best possible medical care for all University of Georgia Athletic Association (UGAA) student athletes.

To enable team physicians to administer prescription medications to UGAA student athletes for sport-related injuries and common illnesses at the time of examination during daily physician clinic, sporting events, or otherwise.

To afford UGAA student athletes the convenience of receiving prescription medications at the time of physician diagnosis to expedite treatment and rehabilitation.

To ensure that compliance is met in the areas of ordering, receipt, storage, transportation, dispensing, administration, disposal, and record keeping according to state and federal law and guidelines established by the NCAA and NATA. Compliance, as it relates to the management of prescription medicines, is critical to the health, well-being, and integrity of the UGAA student athletes, team physicians, team pharmacist, and staff athletic trainers and the integrity of the University of Georgia.

To establish written procedures to define roles and responsibility and the methods by which prescription drugs are ordered, received, stored, dispensed, administered, disposed of, and recorded.

Figure 1  Placards are used to identify each medication, as well as the medication protocol. In addition, placards are color-coded to indicate any medication that might be banned by sport-governing organizations.

**Security**

A designated staff athletic trainer maintains the prescription-medication inventory electronically and keeps records. All prescription medications are stored in a locked cabinet or in a locked medical-treatment kit. Medications in the medical office are stocked on a labeled shelf. Samples and controlled substances are separately locked and secured as mandated by the
FDA. When the medical office is not in use for clinic, the office door is locked, as well as the cabinets in which medications are stored. All medical-treatment kits are stored in the locked cabinet in the medical office. The medical-treatment kits are used to store prescription medications when authorized UGAA athletic teams are traveling, practicing, or competing at home or at some other designated location or event as determined necessary by the team physician. A kit is used only in the presence of the team physician. In many settings, a Banyan stat kit can be used, and it is also stored in the medical office. The main purpose of the stat kit is to provide 30 min of care in emergency situations—to sustain life during the critical, early stages until transportation to the hospital is available. Because of the emergency nature of the Banyan kit, it should not be locked but is secured with a tamper-resistant security tag.

**Dispensing Prescription Medications**

Only a licensed team physician or licensed pharmacist may dispense prescription medications. Dispensing of prescription medications cannot be delegated to athletic trainers; it is beyond their scope of practice. Staff athletic trainers may assist the team physician as outlined in the prescription-drug program. When a team physician or pharmacist dispenses a prescription medication, a SOAP note must be written and signed by the physician. Each medication is logged out on a written form. At the end of the day, the designated staff athletic trainer takes the written form and electronically logs out the medication. In this manner, it can be tracked by the inventory software. Prescription-drug audits are conducted quarterly to ensure accuracy of inventory and compliance, and an annual affiliation report is provided by the team pharmacist. This report must be kept on file for a minimum of 7 years according to federal law.

Our prescription medications are prepackaged in therapeutic doses. Therapeutic-dose packs are required because

They aid in the process of accounting and reconciliation without the need to open the package to count the number of pills remaining.

They enable optimal administration unit dose or full therapeutic dose, depending on the needs of the physician.

All blister packs are labeled according to the guidelines of the FDA and the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy.

**Sample Medications**

Sample medications must also be tracked. The name of the drug representative or physician bringing samples into the athletic medical office is recorded. According to FDA guidelines, all prescription-drug samples must be stored separately from other medications in a locked cabinet in the athletic medical office. For all samples dispensed by the physician, the athlete who received the medication, the quantity, lot number, and the date and the initials of the medical assistant helping the physician with the record-keeping process are recorded. All expired samples are recorded and given to the team pharmacy for proper destruction.

**Acquiring Medications**

We have used this OTC- and prescription-drug system at the University of Georgia for the past 3 years and have found it to be highly beneficial. All of our OTC drugs are ordered from our designated team pharmacy through SportPharm. Again, all OTC drugs are ordered in individual unit dose packages. All of the prescription medications that are dispensed by the team physicians from the athletic training facility are from team-physician medical bags or are purchased from our team pharmacy through SportPharm. The electronic system allows us to reconcile our drug inventory at any time and count to a pill any medication distributed to any athlete by our team physicians. This is an extremely important aspect from a medical legal-liability standpoint. From a cost-containment standpoint, we use sample prescription medications quite frequently, particularly anti-inflammatory medications. These sample medications are typically provided by either the drug manufacturer through representatives or from physician offices. In addition,
prescriptions that are filled outside of our athletic training medical office must be filled in one of two designated facilities. The pharmacist at the university health center’s pharmacy fills most of these. This pharmacy is located in the university health center complex where our student athletes receive medical care and offers convenience, as well as competitive pricing with a state-system discount. In addition, we have a designated 24-hr pharmacy in the event that prescription medications are needed outside the university health center pharmacy’s hours.

Summary

The management of both OTC and prescription medications is an important concern in the athletic training room. Certified athletic trainers should ensure that they are in compliance with both state and federal guidelines. Establishing medication policies and procedures will ensure compliance, as well as continuity of care, among multiple medical providers, from team physicians to staff athletic trainers.

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