

# Culture of Safety:

Transform Patient Safety and Workforce Resilience in US Retail Pharmacies



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# Introduction Summary

01

## The Safety Challenges in Retail Pharmacy

The United States retail pharmacy sector is integral to the healthcare system, bridging the gap between medical professionals and patients while dispensing over 4.5 billion prescriptions annually. However, patient and staff safety in retail pharmacies has become a growing concern recently. Several factors, including high workloads, understaffing, and increasing complexity of medications, have contributed to increased medication errors and other safety incidents.



- ✓ Prescription Volume & Complexity
- ✓ Safety Risks & Workforce Strain
- ✓ Culture-Driven Improvement

With increasing demands on retail pharmacy teams—such as heightened prescription volumes, complex medication regimens, and prevalence of medication-related issues—patient safety has become a primary concern for customers, employees, and the media. Urgent safety and staff support interventions are needed to address these interconnected issues and foster a safer, healthier environment in retail pharmacy settings.

This white paper delves into the current state, identifying core issues, examining market responses, and offering insights into using safety culture to enhance patient safety and workforce resilience.

## Evolving Pharmacy Risk Landscape

02

### The Foundational Challenges to Patient Safety and Workforce Resilience Unprecedented Workforce Dynamics

⚠ Unprecedented Workforce Dynamics

⚠ Prescription Errors: A Looming Crisis

⚠ A Heightened Overall Risk Profile

#### ● Unprecedented Workforce Dynamics

Nationwide staffing shortages in retail pharmacy chains like CVS and Walgreens have led to revised operational strategies, including reduced operating hours, contributing to staff burnout exacerbated by the high-stress pharmacy environment. A 2022 survey highlighted a safety concern, with 70% of pharmacists experiencing workplace violence within the past year. Inadequate training and support further strain staff, reducing job satisfaction, compromising patient care, and increasing error rates. Media attention on major U.S. pharmacy chains underscores the growing labor unrest, spotlighting challenges such as long hours and inadequate staffing, and sparking demands for better working conditions and patient safety measures.

#### ● Prescription Errors: A Looming Crisis

In the U.S. retail pharmacy sector, a concerning issue takes center stage—prescription errors. A 2019 study by the Pew Research Center found that 27% of Americans have made a mistake with their prescription medications, and nearly half of those mistakes occurred at the pharmacy. These errors, deeply embedded in systemic challenges, endanger patient safety and the financial stability of pharmacies. Staff shortages, insufficient training, communication breakdowns, heavy workloads, stress, and technological glitches contribute to this critical problem. The consequences are dire, ranging from adverse reactions to overdoses and even fatalities.

## ● A Heightened Overall Risk Profile

The risk landscape in U.S. retail pharmacies is shaped by a range of persistent challenges. These include chronic staff burnout, ongoing pharmacy errors, workforce shortages, technological shortcomings, and a demanding regulatory framework. Fueled by long hours and staffing gaps, burnout raises error risks and worsens service quality, increasing operational vulnerabilities. Errors often result from insufficient training, communication problems, and technical issues, posing threats to patient safety and regulatory compliance. Evolving regulations require strict adherence, with violations potentially leading to material repercussions. These intertwined factors jeopardize patient safety, trigger compliance issues, damage reputation, and strain finances. Eroded trust, regulatory costs, compensation, and lost revenue further exacerbate operational challenges.

# Building the Foundation for a Safer Future

# 03

## A Way Forward

A key path to achieving highly reliable, safe care is a strong culture of safety across all levels of the organization. How is that culture developed?



The following recommendations are based on best practices and Beterra's extensive experience working with healthcare organizations to strengthen safety culture and improve system reliability.

## ● Build Patient Safety Improvement Infrastructure

**Establish Dedicated Teams for Safety and Quality:** Create specialized teams responsible for monitoring and enhancing safety protocols, conducting safety audits, and implementing best practices. These teams proactively address safety concerns, ensuring a safer environment for patients and staff.

**Incorporate Frontline Feedback:** Encourage employees at all levels to actively share input on safety concerns, improvement opportunities, and potential solutions.

Incorporating frontline feedback fosters trust, promotes engagement, and ensures the development of relevant and practical safety strategies that truly reflect day-to-day realities.

**Develop System-Wide Strategies:** Create system-wide strategies covering all patient care and safety aspects, from prescription handling to customer interactions. Consistency in approach enhances patient safety and minimizes errors.

**Recognize the Distributed Workforce:** Adapt safety measures to suit the unique challenges faced by dispersed locations while maintaining consistent safety and quality standards through standardized training programs, uniform safety protocols, and regular assessments.

## ● Adopt and Adapt Best Practices from Acute Care

Engage Experienced Safety and Quality Leaders from US Hospital Systems



Collaborate with seasoned professionals from leading hospital systems to establish a robust patient safety infrastructure within retail pharmacies. Their expertise helps identify and mitigate risks, implement effective safety protocols, and cultivate a strong culture of continuous improvement.

Learn from Extensive Literature and Best Practices



Examine evidence-based best practices from acute care settings for managing high-stress environments and apply them to retail pharmacy operations. These proven approaches include workload optimization, stress management, error prevention, and resilience-building strategies.

## ● Create a Roadmap for a Culture of Safety

The following is a strategic approach to cultivating a safety culture within retail pharmacies, focusing on both patient safety and workforce resilience.

**Develop a Comprehensive Safety Culture Strategy:** Build a broader strategy for safety culture by leveraging internal and external benchmarking for insights. Address key culture risks in specific retail locations and establish ongoing staff feedback mechanisms to inform and evaluate the effectiveness of safety initiatives. This comprehensive approach ensures that safety culture is continuously evolving and organization-wide.

**Rapidly Assess the Current Safety Culture:** Gather data through various means, including anonymous frontline feedback, validated surveys (e.g., Surveys on Patient Safety), and internal/external analyses, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the safety landscape for both staff and patients.

**Leverage Frontline Feedback for Trust and Programming:** Use frontline feedback to inform safety programs, foster trust, and maintain a transparent communication channels.

Implement a Simple Actions Infrastructure: Establish an infrastructure to engage diverse teams in the safety and prevention of burnout. This infrastructure facilitates data communication, sharing key learnings, and implementing actions to enhance security.



## The Very First Next Step

04

### A Safety Culture Survey

Safety culture surveys are vital for assessing and enhancing safety culture across industries.



They have a proven track record in high-risk sectors like aviation, nuclear power, and healthcare for over two decades, demonstrating their reliability. In healthcare, including pharmacy settings, they have been employed for 15+ years, reflecting

their adaptability and effectiveness. Regulatory bodies have mandated safety culture surveys in acute care settings, emphasizing their significance in ensuring patient safety. Safety culture is foundational, shaping an organization's commitment to safety at every level. Prioritizing safety culture sets the tone for an organization's values, influencing all decisions and actions.

## Closing Summary

# 05

### Sustaining Safety Through Insight

Retail pharmacies can leverage validated safety culture surveys tailored to their specific needs, such as those developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). These tools assess safety culture, identify areas for improvement, and facilitate targeted interventions. They have undergone extensive validation and global use, making them applicable to diverse pharmacy environments.



Using these surveys, retail pharmacies can systematically evaluate their safety culture, identify areas for enhancement, and proactively nurture a culture of safety that benefits both patients and staff.

## About Beterra

Beterra is a healthcare technology company focused on building tools for safety and quality management.

Our solutions help clients accelerate improvement via collection, analysis, sensemaking, and safety and quality data utilization.

Scan the QR code to explore our website or contact us at [hello@beterra.com](mailto:hello@beterra.com)

