

MLMIC Risk Management Tips

Tip #6: Managing Medication Samples

The Risk: Medication samples are widely used in physicians' offices. The proper storage, handling, dispensing, and disposal of medication samples are necessary to prevent medication errors and subsequent patient injuries.

Recommendations:

1. Develop policies and procedures for storing, handling, dispensing, and disposing of medication samples in your office practice.
2. Store medication samples in a safe and secure location in your office to reduce the risk of theft and unauthorized use. Limit access to licensed staff members. Medication samples must not be kept in examination rooms or areas that are easily accessible to patients and visitors (e.g., in unlocked drawers or on countertops). Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for storage of each drug.
3. Maintain a log of your supply of medication samples. Assign the responsibility of monitoring and tracking the inventory to one staff member. The log should include documentation of the monitoring of expiration dates.
4. Explain the proper use of the drugs to the patients and any special instructions or warnings in the event the patient does not have sufficient reading skills.
5. Record all medication samples dispensed to patients in the medical record. Documentation should include the medication, the amount, the dosage, the frequency, and any instructions provided to the patient.
6. Properly dispose of expired medication samples, when necessary, in accordance with state, federal, and local laws.