



# TRIPLER ARMY MEDICAL CENTER

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**March 23, 2010**

## **Pharmacists are stepping outside the pharmacy walls**

TRIPLER ARMY MEDICAL CENTER —Most patients getting prescriptions at Tripler frame their pharmacy experience around the small windows where they get their medications.

They don't see the dozens of pharmacists and technicians who work behind the walls of the pharmacy. They and their fellow staffers working elsewhere at Tripler fill and refill an average of 2,000 prescriptions a day for all service members, retirees and family members from all walks of military life on Oahu.

“Some patients get frustrated waiting at our outpatient pharmacy, but if they would just understand what is going on behind that wall,” said Dr. Brian White, Tripler pharmacy department's clinical coordinator.

White explained that by law, whether at a military clinic pharmacy or at drugstore downtown, a licensed pharmacist must check all prescriptions to ensure each prescription being readied is the right drug and the right dosage. The pharmacist also checks for any possible allergic reaction or drug interaction with other medications already prescribed for the patient.

“It's okay for the guy to rush to get a Big Mac ready,” White commented. “You don't really want to think that the pharmacist behind the counter is rushing through the steps when they're filling your prescription.”

White said Tripler's wait times compare favorably with civilian hospitals. Here, the average wait time today is 27 minutes. Before entering the Army, Maj. James Masterson, now deputy chief of Tripler's pharmacy department, recalls that the average wait time at a local pharmacy where he worked two years ago was about 45 minutes.

One reason why the military clinic pharmacies here are popular (and thus more crowded), is that they are much more accessible to active duty members and retirees, compared to those on the mainland, who rely more on the mail order service.

“In central Pennsylvania, it might be three and a half hours from the nearest MTF [military medical treatment facility],” said Masterson. He noted that for many patients, drugs dispensed at MTFs don’t require co-payments, unlike drugs ordered through the TRICARE mail order system.

Besides ensuring a quality system of dispensing prescriptions, Tripler pharmacists also work closely with patients’ doctors to provide better healthcare. In January, a pharmacist was added to the Warrior Transition Battalion at Schofield Barracks.

“We had a triad of care for the WT’s [Warriors in Transition], consisting of the squad leader, the nurse case manager and the physician,” Masterson said. “Now it’s more like a square.”

The on-site pharmacist helps with patient education, ensuring that Soldiers understand why they are taking medications and to be alert to possible side effects. The pharmacist also keeps track of how well Soldiers are taking medications as prescribed.

“These Soldiers have so much going on in their lives. It’s important that the pharmacist track their medications, especially the high-risk Soldiers,” Masterson said.

Closer links between pharmacists and doctors isn’t new at Tripler. Over the past several years, pharmacists have become part of the healthcare teams in the adult medicine, family practice, and emergency services clinics and the neo-natal intensive care unit (NICU).

White said these pharmacists tend to get the more challenging patients, who have multiple medications and patients who may not know how to take their medications.

“The pharmacists do the whole gamut,” said White “Diabetes, asthma education, chronic diseases that tend to be controlled by medications. Physicians are often constrained by 15-minute appointments. We can spend 45 to 60 minutes, to give them the extra time.”

“As medicine has become more complex and numerous, there’s just too much to know. Pharmacists have stepped up to become the clinical experts on drugs,” White said.

White said that the pharmacists in the clinics can be seen by appointment or as walk-ins when available. They explain to patients not only the medicine they are being prescribed, but also discuss non-drug therapies that enhance the patient’s health, from diets to exercise plans. Pharmacists can also manage the doses being prescribed and adjust them as needed, in consultation with the patients’ doctor.

“A take-home message for Tripler patients is that at any point in the healthcare system here on Oahu, if someone wants to speak to a pharmacist , whether it be at the dispensing pharmacy or after they leave, pretty much there’s a pharmacist available to talk with them. All they need to do is ask,” said Masterson.

**Pharmacy phone numbers**

Tripler Pharmacy Information: 433-7880 x 3

Schofield Barracks Health Clinic Pharmacy Information: 433-8425

Tripler/Schofield Barracks Refill Requests: 433-6962



Tripler pharmacist Dr. Ingrid Shлива, consults with Cpt. (Dr.) Aparna Raizada, chief of inpatient pharmacy services. Shлива researches drugs not in the Tripler formulary but specially requested by doctors for certain patients. U.S. Army photo by Leslie Ozawa



Tripler pharmacist Dr. Geraldine Baguio measures liquid flavoring used to also dilute the strength of a prescription drug for a pediatric formulation. U.S. Army photo by Leslie Ozawa.