

Fast, competent solutions for patients



Since the start of 2019, pharmacies have been able to dispense certain prescription medications over the counter without a doctor's prescription, subject to certain conditions. For many patients, this is a fast, safe and straightforward solution when they have acute symp-

toms. In this way, the Galenica pharmacies are making a significant contribution to the safety and health of patients. Pharmacists are increasingly supported by algorithms that have been specially developed for this purpose.

A patient has a runny, puffy nose, watery eyes and constant itching and sneezing. It's immediately clear to him that the start of spring has brought with it the onset of the pollen season. He needs the right medication to relieve his symptoms as soon as possible. When he gets to the Amavita pharmacy, the pharmacist first asks him about his symptoms and clarifies possible risk factors such as severe breathing difficulties. During the focused consultation, she is supported by the Documedis® Primary Care Algorithms module from HCI Solutions. The pharmacist enters all the patient's answers and information in this system. Although he does not have any severe breathing difficulties, he is having trouble sleeping and feels restricted in his day-to-day activities due to his symptoms. The pharmacist rules out an emergency and asks the patient to come to the consultation room for a more in-depth assessment. Here, the patient confirms that he has had the same symptoms every spring for years, and that the doctor has always prescribed medication. Based on what the patient says, the pharmacist concludes that the patient has seasonal allergic rhinitis, otherwise known as hay fever, and due to the severity of the symptoms, that he needs a prescription allergy medication. She rules out other allergies with similar symptoms such as dust mite allergy due to the seasonal nature of the symptoms. The Documedis® module also recommends antihistamine treatment based on the patient information entered. The pharmacist explains to the patient how to take the medication and dispenses it to him.

Improved access to therapeutic products and medical services

Since the start of 2019, pharmacies in Switzerland have been able to dispense certain prescription medications over the counter without a doctor's prescription, subject to certain conditions. For patients, this means fast, safe and straightforward access to therapeutic products and medical services.

Demographic change in Switzerland is posing significant challenges for healthcare. Growing life expectancy is increasing demand for health services, while at the same time, rates of chronic and lifestyle diseases are rising among the population. To ensure continuing access for all to high-quality basic healthcare in the future, new supply models and collaboration between all service providers are needed. Basic healthcare covers all services which, from experience, are used by a majority of the population. Pharmacies play a key role here.

In view of this, the ordinary revision of the Therapeutic Products Act (TPA) came into force on 1 January 2019. The new TPA has resulted in certain drugs being reclassified within the different dispensing categories, among other things. Certain prescription medications can now be dispensed over the counter by a pharmacist in justified cases without a doctor's prescription for indications defined in Annex 2 of the Ordinance on Medicinal Products (VAM). However, this must be documented (for further information, see infobox on Dispensing categories on page 39).

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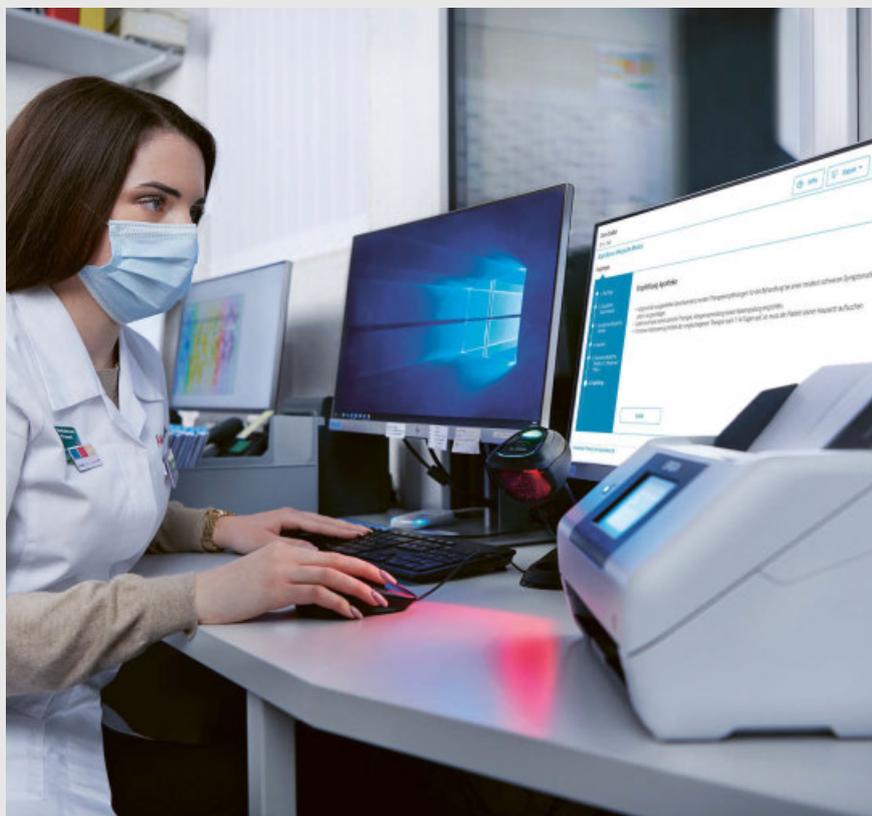
THE PHARMACY AS THE FIRST POINT OF CONTACT IS NOT ONLY PRACTICAL FOR PATIENTS; IT ALSO RELIEVES THE BURDEN ON THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM.

Improved basic healthcare

“This change strengthens the role of pharmacists in the healthcare system. It means additional skills and duties for our pharmacists, but also greater responsibility,” explains Carine de Mesmaeker, Head of Health Insurers and Cooperation at Galenicare. The profession of pharmacist has changed significantly in recent years: from producer and seller of therapeutic products to advisor and provider of additional services. “As a pharmacist, these additional skills give me the opportunity to offer customers primary care directly in the pharmacy if the treating physician is not available or the patient doesn’t want to go to the emergency department,” says Nicole Jonin, Managing Pharmacist at Amavita Domdidier. The pharmacy as the first point of contact is not only practical for patients; it also relieves the burden on the healthcare system. Minor accidents no longer have to be treated by a doctor or even at the emergency department, but can be taken care of in the pharmacy.

Documedis® Primary Care Algorithms (PCA.CE)

The Documedis® *Primary Care Algorithms* (PCA.CE) module comprises a set of algorithms for frequent ailments such as allergic rhinitis, irritable stomach, reflux disorders and urinary tract infection. Documedis PCA.CE has been approved by Swissmedic, the Swiss Agency for Therapeutic Products, as a Class I medical device according to Art. 6 of the Medical Devices Ordinance (MedDO). This means that the processes developed by HCI Solutions are certified. Pharmacists are guided through the consultation with the help of algorithms and obtain a recommendation on how to proceed, including suggested medications. They can also document the consultation at the same time. The patient information entered is not saved in Documedis®. The pharmacist however always decides on and is responsible for dispensing the medicinal product and its dosage. The algorithms are only an aid.



Thanks to a dense network of pharmacies, medication and advisory services are easily accessible for the entire Swiss population – without an appointment and long waiting times. According to Nicole Jonin, customers appreciate the fast, competent advice without having to book an appointment, and are also prepared to pay for additional advisory services. Patients have the choice of booking a doctor’s appointment or going to the pharmacy. “This promotes patients’ health literacy and autonomy,” adds Carine de Mesmaeker, highlighting the increased patient-centric focus of healthcare. The key is to understand patient needs and enable patients to handle or correctly manage their own health.

“We have implemented various measures at Galenica in recent years to empower our pharmacies and support them in this new role. These include training, further education, process adjustments in the quality management system as well as developing digital tools such as the Documedis® Primary Care Algorithms module,” explains Andrea Brügger, Health Insurer and Cooperation Specialist at Galenicare.

Quality is the top priority

Easily accessible basic healthcare must ensure equally high quality with a focus on the safety and health of patients. Training and further education for specialists therefore play a key role. “We offer pharmacies web-based training to learn the new processes, skills and how to use the new Documedis® module. All pharmacists and pharmacy assistants are required to complete this training,” explains Andrea Brügger. Pharmacists can also obtain the Certificate of Competence in Medical History in Basic Healthcare Provision to strengthen their new skills. A medical history involves systematic questioning of a patient to record their current symptoms and previous conditions. This further training enables pharmacists to carry out competent, targeted patient consultations at the pharmacy, quickly identify emergency situations and make an initial assessment based on frequent symptoms. In 2019 and 2020, 60 Galenica pharmacists completed the training. A further 200 pharmacists are currently taking the training.

Pharmacists are required to document dispensing of prescription medications without a doctor’s prescription. “As part of our quality management, we have introduced two new processes and developed hard-copy forms for all therapeutic products dispensing that requires documentation,” explains Christa Strahm, Quality Specialist at Galenicare. “These include all legally required details on the health of the patient that have to be documented by the pharmacist, as well as important information on the use of the therapeutic product. The forms support pharmacists in their work and ensure high quality and safety for our patients.” HCI Solutions has also developed additional digital applications as part of Documedis® for the most common illnesses. Pharmacists decide themselves whether they should document these types of consultation digitally or on paper.



THE FOCUS IS ON
THE NEEDS OF PATIENTS.

Increased patient safety thanks to algorithms

“The new Documedis® module guides pharmacists through the consultation using targeted questions and gives recommendations based on the defined algorithms and patient information entered,” explains Regina Andermatten, Head of Medical Data at HCI Solutions. The recommendations support pharmacists in their decisions. Regina Andermatten adds that this ensures the required documentation of category B prescription medications. Algorithms are – in general terms – approaches programmed into software to solve a frequent problem. Using the algorithms in the Documedis® module, the system works out a solution, in this case a treatment or drug recommendation, based on the answers entered during the consultation. These types of intelligent systems have considerable potential to improve healthcare quality and efficiency by supporting diagnoses and treatment decisions. (For further information, see box on Algorithms.)

“The support with medical histories and treatment decisions we get from the algorithms is very worthwhile for us as pharmacists. They’re also easy to use,” says pharmacist Nicole Jonin. HCI Solutions has since also developed algorithms for various non-prescription medicinal products for common ailments that pharmacists wanted support with. One example is worrisome tick bites.

A total of 11 algorithms were rolled out in 2019 and 2020, including for conditions such as allergic rhinitis, conjunctivitis and urinary tract infections. Documedis PCA.CE is a Class I medical device. “HCI Solutions develops the algorithms based on ISO 9001-certified data content,” explains Regina Andermatten. More algorithms are already planned for 2021, including for lumbalgia, earache and sinusitis.

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Changes to the dispensing categories of medicinal products in Switzerland

Dispensing of licensed medicinal products is strictly regulated by law in Switzerland. To ensure patient safety, medicinal products are classified into different dispensing categories. Depending on the category, they can be dispensed in pharmacies, drugstores or by retailers. A basic distinction is made between prescription medications, non-prescription medications dispensed after specialist advice and over-the-counter medications.

Until the end of 2018, medications in dispensing categories A and B were mainly dispensed with a doctor's prescription, while those in category C were dispensed after specialist advice under the control of a pharmacist. As part of the revision of the Therapeutic Products Act, the government decided to eliminate the previous dispensing category C and reclassify the medicinal products concerned to category B or D.

Medicinal products with an increased risk of abuse or which could lead to severe interactions with other medicinal products have been reclassified to dispensing category B.

The Federal Council also classified in category B medicinal products for treatment of common illnesses that a survey of pharmacists indicated should be allowed to be dispensed without a doctor's prescription.

Category B medications must be dispensed personally by a pharmacist and documented.

