



ABSOLUTE SCOOP

DID YOU KNOW?

Shift-to-shift counts protect you and your license. They must be done by two nurses, every shift change and any time keys are exchanged.

SAFE NARCOTIC STORAGE, HANDLING, AND DOCUMENTATION

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Proper handling of controlled medications protects our residents, our licenses, and ourselves. This guide walks through the full lifecycle of narcotic medications—from delivery to destruction—highlighting required procedures and best practices to ensure compliance, safety, and accountability at all times.

Receiving Narcotic Medications

When controlled medications are delivered to the facility, accuracy and documentation are critical.

Upon Delivery:

- Sign the packing slip, verifying receipt of tote, and fax to pharmacy
- A nurse must verify the contents of the tote against the packing slip
- Any discrepancies must be reported to the pharmacy within 24 hours
- Unwanted controlled medications cannot be sent back with the driver

Count Sheet Requirements:

- Sign the top center of the count sheet and document number of doses along with the date
- Lock medications immediately in the narcotic drawer
- Add the count sheet to the narcotic book
- Document the addition in the shift-to-shift log
- A second nurse must verify the addition and initial the shift-to-shift log

Storage Requirements:

Controlled medications must be secured at all times.

- Medications must be under double lock at all times
- The only exception is when:
 - You are actively preparing a dose
 - You are standing directly in front of the cart
- Both cart locks must be engaged when not in use
- Keys must remain on your person for the entire shift until officially signed over

Package Integrity Matters:

- Medications must stay in original pharmacy packaging
- Do not repackage medications—examples include taping broken pods or transferring tablets into crush bags for easier counting
- Any signs of tampering must be reported immediately

CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE COUNT LOG SHEET

Shift-to-Shift Narcotic Counts

Shift-to-shift counts protect you and your license. They must be done every shift change and any time keys are exchanged.

- Counts must be completed by two nurses together
- Verify:
 - Count sheets match the previous shift
 - Any changes are documented and accounted for
 - Medication quantities are correct
 - Liquids are checked at every count
 - Packaging is intact with no signs of tampering

Documentation Rules

- Each new count sheet page must have the top section completed by two nurses
 - This ensures errors don't carry forward beyond one page
- Your signatures must always be on back-to-back lines
 - One signature acknowledging receipt of keys
 - One signature releasing keys as the outgoing nurse



- Each signature confirms:
 - The drawer contents were verified
 - Counts are accurate
 - Package integrity is maintained

Any concerns or discrepancies must be reported to the DON immediately.

Administering Narcotic Medications

Every dose removed must be documented immediately on count sheet(s) and in the patient's MAR. If a dose is signed out on the count sheet but not documented in eMAR, it creates a serious discrepancy. Always ensure documentation matches.

Refusals and Wasted Doses

If a dose is prepared but refused:

- Two nurses are required to destroy the dose
- Use a dated RxDestroyer, Drug Buster bottle, or equivalent
- Document the waste on the count sheet and refusal in eMAR
- Both nurses must sign

When Medication Leaves the Facility

There are three common scenarios—completed medication, discontinuation, or pharmacy return.

Completed Card or Bottle:

- Document removal in the shift-to-shift log
- Remove the count sheet
- Two nurses must verify and sign

Medication or Patient Discontinued:

- Notify the DON of medications needing removal
- Destruction must be completed by the DON with a witness
- Document on the count sheet:
 - Quantity remaining
 - Date removed
 - Who received doses or confirmation of destruction
- Two signatures required
- DON ensures all destruction log sections are completed
- Best practice—designate a weekly destruction day

Return to Pharmacy:

- Controlled medications may only be returned with prior pharmacy approval
- Pharmacy will provide a return kit and instructions
- Chain of custody must be maintained

Final Takeaway

Accurate handling and documentation of narcotics isn't just policy—it's protection. Every signature, count, and double-check ensures resident safety and safeguards your professional license. When in doubt, stop, document, and ask. If something doesn't look right, report it immediately. It's always better to ask questions than to assume.

About the Author



Outside of work, Marina can be found traveling (her favorite vacation spot is Croatia - where her parents grew up), scuba diving, and spending time with her husband, dogs, and cats!

Marina has been with Absolute Pharmacy for 9 years. She started as an operations pharmacist and is now part of our consultant pharmacist team. When asked about what she enjoys most about her job, her answer is "providing valuable help to our facilities and patients". Whether providing immunizations, solving medication-related problems, writing informative articles, or interacting with other healthcare professionals, Marina's passion for patient care is evident in all she does!

What do you call an emergency in Spring?

May Day.



What do you call a bee that can't make up its mind?

A Maybe.