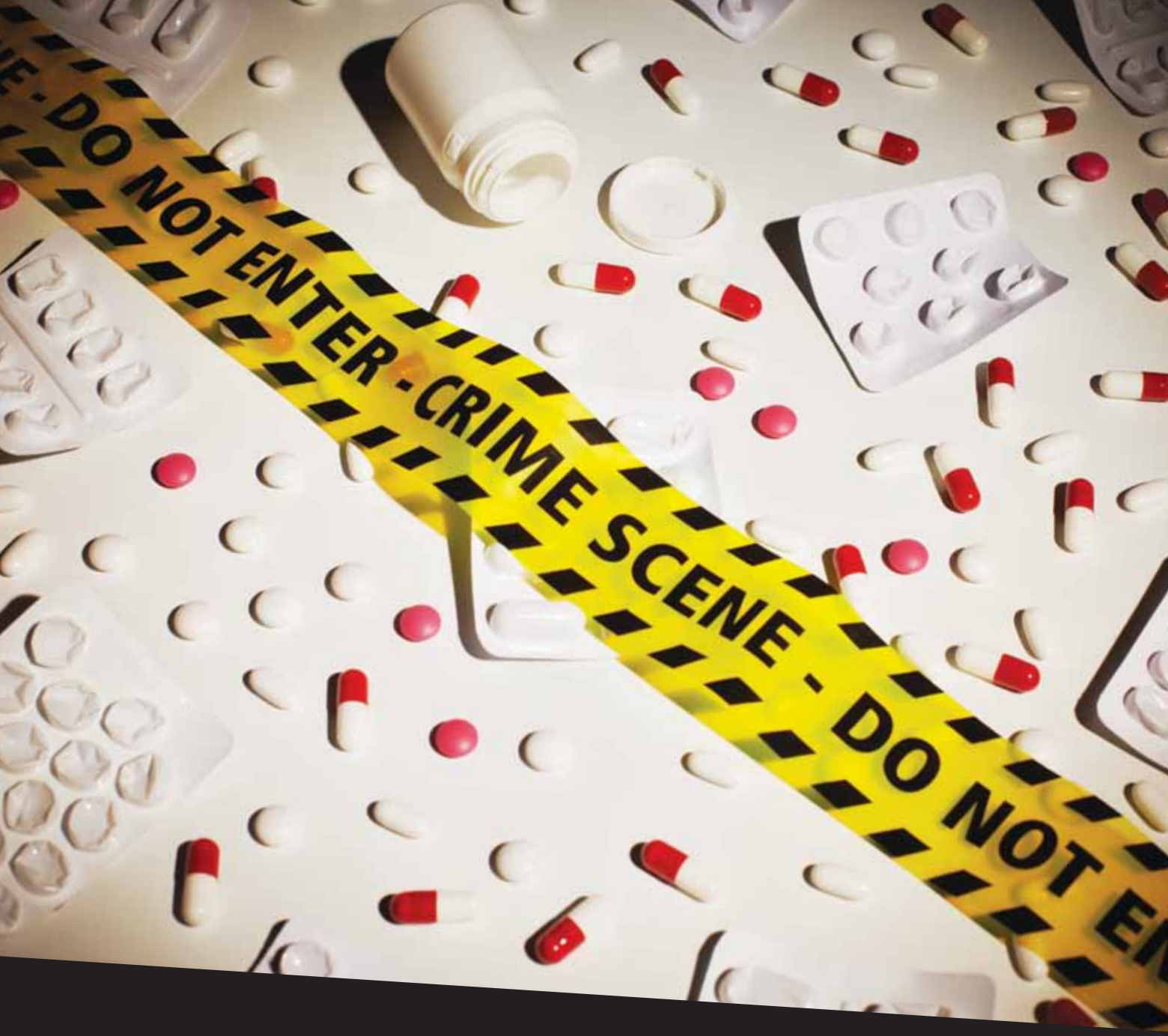


The Rx for pharmacy safety

A police captain answers questions about pharmacy security

By Valerie Briggs

Pharmacy crime is a growing concern for us all. It affects our customers, our employees, and our businesses. As it touches more communities across the country, pharmacists are looking for ways to work with law enforcement to prevent pharmacy crime. This is why the National Community Pharmacists Association developed the Protect Your Pharmacy Now! Program in 2008 to help educate our members about pharmacy crime.

One of our partners in Protect Your Pharmacy Now! is a program called RxPATROL® that is helping law enforcement apprehend pharmacy crime suspects and helping pharmacists protect themselves from pharmacy theft and related crimes. Capt. Richard Conklin of the Stamford, Conn., Police Department is the law enforcement consultant to RxPATROL®, which was created by the pharmaceutical company Purdue Pharma. In an interview with *America's Pharmacist,* Conklin answered questions about pharmacy crime trends, how you can protect your store and staff, and what to do should the worst occur.

Q: What types of pharmacy crimes are you seeing?

A: We see a wide variety of crimes, but robbery and burglary are the most prevalent. A robbery is when the criminal uses force, threats, or intimidation to take something of value from someone else. A burglary is most commonly thought of as a "break-in." Burglary occurs when criminals illegally enter the pharmacy when it is closed and steal items.

Q: Can you give us an example of an unusual recent crime trend?

A: A thief posed as an air conditioning repairman. He told the staff he was there to work on the heating and air conditioning unit. No one thought twice about letting him into the secure pharmacy area. No one confirmed a work order or verified his identification. It is really important that employees know who does and does not belong behind the pharmacy counter. Even though it seems reasonable that someone might be authorized to be there, check it out.

I recommend developing a standard operating procedure for when a non-pharmacy employee requests access to the pharmacy area. For example, check with management to verify legitimacy, check their identification, and record the information, and never leave them alone in the pharmacy area. The goal is to make the pharmacy a harder target. Even if it might seem impolite to ask for verification, ask any way.

Q: What steps can we take to prevent pharmacy crime?

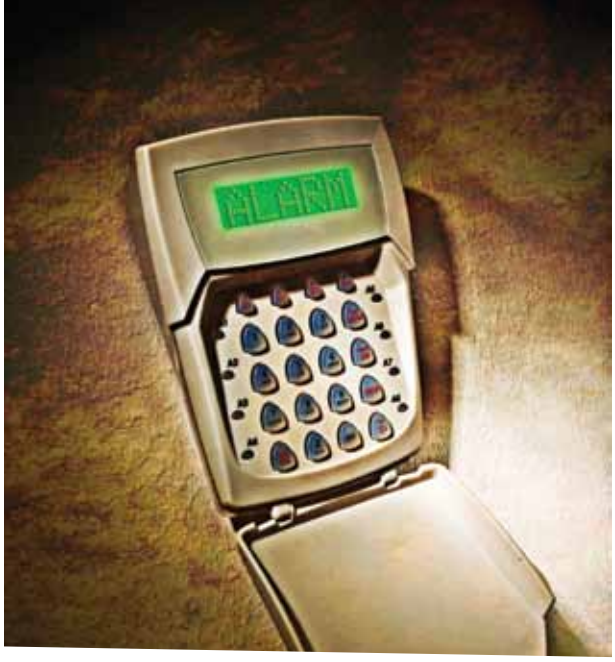
A: You want to make your business a difficult target outside and inside. Start with the parking lot and exterior of the building because that is the first area a criminal will assess. Don't provide criminals with tools; make sure there is no debris, such as trash can lids, lumber, or any other item that could be used to break the windows. Clearing the area close to the store of large items, such as trash dumpsters, that could provide a good hiding place or access to the roof of the building is important. The roof is a common entry point for more sophisticated criminals. Once on the roof, criminals are out of sight and can spend time trying to enter the structure. Make sure any vents, mechanical equipment, or roof access hatches are secured.

I want to mention another trend we're seeing in relation to securing your perimeter. Would someone be able to access the pharmacy by smashing through the wall or by crawling through the false ceiling from a neighboring business? You can use products from your local hardware store, such as steel mesh in the ceiling. It could prevent access to your space.

Q: What security measures should be used inside stores?

A: An important way to combat burglary as well as robbery is through the use of video cameras. Often, people who are planning to steal will check out or "case" the store before committing their crime. The presence of video cameras is a great deterrent. As burglaries happen when the store is closed, adding a night-vision camera in the pharmacy and drug storage area is a good idea. These cameras are gener-

PHOTOGRAPHY: TIM ROBBERTS



PHOTOGRAPHY: HEMERA

ally infra-red sensitive and capture great video, even in the dark. If an incident does occur, video footage will greatly aid law enforcement in their investigation.

Consider using inexpensive "dummy" cameras to supplement your real security cameras. They provide a cost savings and potential criminals think you have more cameras recording their actions.

Q: Do you have recommendations on using security cameras to the fullest potential?

A: Many businesses have cameras, but fail to position them in optimal locations or angles. In the case of a robbery, your cameras are best utilized at the front door and at the pharmacy counter. Position the camera so that it can capture a clear frontal view of the suspect's face. Be sure they are visible so that potential criminals will know they are under surveillance. If you are an NCPA member you can receive a complimentary RxPATROL® security mobile that will help draw attention to your camera. No matter whether a burglary or robbery occurs, it is crucial that your camera's recording device is in a secure area so that intruders cannot destroy the recording.

Q: Do you have recommendations on security systems?

A: They are an investment so you want to be certain you get the right type to fit your needs and that it is set up properly. There are two types of alarms: perimeter alarms and motion sensors. Perimeter alarms monitor intrusion through windows and doors, while motion detectors identify movement within the store. I recommend utilizing both types of alarms. Be sure they are supported by a battery in case the perpetrators cut wires or shut down power to disable your alarm. Also, your alarm should be backed up by a cell phone to ensure that the alarm call reaches the security company or local law enforcement should the telephone wires be cut. The most important measure you should take with regard to your alarm is testing it regularly to make sure it is working properly and to make sure your employees know how to use it.

I can't tell you how many times crimes occur and the alarm was either not turned on or not working properly. Also, be sure to fix any broken equipment immediately and to not override or disable the system if it appears to be malfunctioning.

(NCPA members are eligible for discounts on security systems, safes and other crime deterrents as part of Protect Your Pharmacy Now! by visiting www.ncpanet.org/index.php/protect-your-pharmacy)

Q: Are there inexpensive measures pharmacies can take to help prevent theft?

A: Yes, you don't have to spend a lot of money to make a pharmacy a harder target. Store controlled drugs in a safe instead of on shelves visible to customers. Be wary of people "loitering" around the pharmacy area. Make sure employees know what to do should a robbery happen. Have a policy and procedure in place and rehearse it. Simple things like wiping down the pharmacy's counters at night so it will be easier for the police to gather fingerprints if there is a break-in. It is a small thing that can have a major impact.

Consider adding height references to doorframes, which will help with suspect description. RxPATROL has partnered with NCPA to provide every member with a complimentary height indicator, which also contains helpful tips on how to react to an armed robbery. Let potential burglars know that your store is protected by an alarm system. Clearly display window decals from your alarm company, law enforcement and RxPATROL® in your windows and near the doors. NCPA members can receive complimentary RxPATROL® window decals.

Q: How can NCPA members help each other?

A: Work with colleagues at other pharmacies in your area. From prescription forgeries to attempted break-ins, let each other know so you can all be on the lookout and



take extra security measures. Register with RxPATROL.org and enter incidents into the database. The more pharmacies and law enforcement agencies that participate, the better our information gets, and everyone benefits.

Q: If you are the victim of a robbery, what should you do?

A: Remember the Protect Your Pharmacy Now! week theme:

R.E.A.C.T.

Remain Calm

- Comply with suspect.
- Do not resist.
- End encounter as soon as possible.

Eye Witness

- Make mental notes of suspect description.

Activate Alarm

- Activate robbery alarm as soon as it is safe to do so.
- Lock doors after suspect(s) exits.

Call Police

- Notify police as soon as possible.
- Provide brief description of suspect, mode, and direction of travel.
- Provide additional details as necessary.

Take Charge

- Protect the crime scene.
- Keep customers calm.
- Avoid witness collaboration.
- Assist police with investigation.

For more ideas, and discounts on safes, alarms, security equipment and more, NCPA members can go to www.ncpanet.org/index.php/protect-your-pharmacy. There, pharmacists can also download a free RxPATROL pharmacy security checklist. Pharmacy staff, law enforcement officials, and loss prevention personnel can follow updates about pharmacy robberies, burglaries, and potential threats in their area and nationwide on RxPATROL's Twitter page, www.twitter.com/rxpatrol. aP

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