



# Achieving quality by using SOPs

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We're bombarded with standard operating procedures (SOPs) throughout the working day, but have you ever considered what an SOP is and why we have them? In this article, we're going to take a closer look so that it'll make it easier to understand them, and to comply with them.

## The importance of quality

What does the word "quality" mean to you? We often use it when we're describing something that is particularly good, and very often it is used as a standard when we're comparing similar services or products.

It's very simple – the higher the quality of a product or service, the more likely we are to continue using it. We know that the quality of registered medicines is guaranteed if it is registered by the South African Health Products Authority (SAHPRA), but what about services?

When it comes to services, most consumers will rate it according to how you treat them – are you respectful and helpful? And how do you do this? Remember that most people don't want to come to pharmacies – they're not well and they don't want to be there. So it means that you need to be polite and treat them with respect. You also need to make sure that the services that you offer meet their needs must be of the best possible quality. So the next question is: "How do we achieve high quality services?" While a lot depends on you, and how you relate to consumers, we can ensure the quality of our services by complying with SOPs.

## What is a standard operating procedure?

It is simply a set of instructions on exactly what must be done and how it must be done for a particular task. In the past, when you started a new job, your boss would tell you what to do. It might have been something simple, such as to answer the telephone. Every person would answer the phone in a different way, which would mean that the people phoning in would have a different experience every time they phoned.

Nowadays, an SOP is usually available for just about every task that must take place in the course of the working day.

## Do we really need SOPs?

Hopefully, you have not only seen the SOP file in the pharmacy but you are familiar with its contents. It isn't meant to be a file that gathers dust and is brought out when the Pharmacy Council inspects the pharmacy! It's something that will help you to deliver the best possible service to the community that you serve.

The most important aspect of an SOP is that it is a way of ensuring the quality of the work that is done. It doesn't matter whether you're working in a community pharmacy, hospital pharmacy, primary healthcare clinic or pharmaceutical manufacturing plant – in all cases, we are responsible for ensuring that both products and our services are excellent.

## Contents of an SOP

It's actually quite easy. You need to know:

- What is it that must be done?
- Why?
- When?
- Where?
- How?
- Who must do it?
- How must the action be documented?

## Benefits of having SOPs

At first, it feels as though it's a nuisance having to follow an SOP, but it soon becomes routine. For the employer, it's very useful because it means that everybody who performs a particular task will be doing it correctly and in the same way. SOPs have been shown to improve efficiency, because you know what to do, when to do it and how to do the task. An important benefit is that it prevents misunderstanding because you haven't heard the instruction properly.

When you start a new job, SOPs help you to get to know the way work is done in your new environment. And when you leave a job, they help the person who takes over from you.

Following SOPs when you work reduces the risk of making a mistake. We certainly don't want mistakes to happen, but it does happen. When you make a mistake, it's appropriate to go back to the SOP and see where you went wrong – it'll show you how to improve your work.

## Mandatory SOPs

The responsible pharmacist may identify specific tasks that require an SOP in a particular pharmacy, but there are some that are compulsory. The South African Pharmacy Council's Good Pharmacy Practice (GPP) rules lists a number of SOPs that are mandatory for every type of pharmacy.

## A challenge to YOU!

One day, when you have a lot of time and energy, go to the GPP rules and read about the SOPs that are expected in your workplace. Are they in place? If not, maybe you should take the time and trouble to work out what is missing, and prepare a draft for your responsible

pharmacist to consider. I guarantee that s/he will be impressed!

## Further reading

- <https://bizfluent.com/about-5437915-quality-customer-service-important.html>.
- Good Pharmacy Practice manual – Rule 4.2.3.3 Standard Operating Procedures.
- <https://quickbooks.intuit.com/ca/resources/business/importance-and-benefits-of-standard-operating-procedures/>.
- Manghani K. Quality assurance: Importance of systems and standard operating procedures. *Perspect Clin Res.* 2011;2:34-7. Available from: <https://www.picronline.org/text.asp?2011/2/1/34/76288>.