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# DRUG DIVERSION IN THE OPERATING ROOM

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# Learning Objectives

- Define drug diversion
- Discuss why drug diversion is an ongoing issue in OR
- Describe methods to identify drug diversion
- Describe prevention measures



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# Drug Diversion

- The National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators officially defines drug diversion as “a medical and legal concept involving the **illegal movement, adulteration, marketing, or transfer of any legal controlled substance** anywhere within the **supply chain**; from manufacturer to end user.”





# Potential points of vulnerabilities

**FIGURE 1**

## Potential Failure Points in the Medication-Use Process

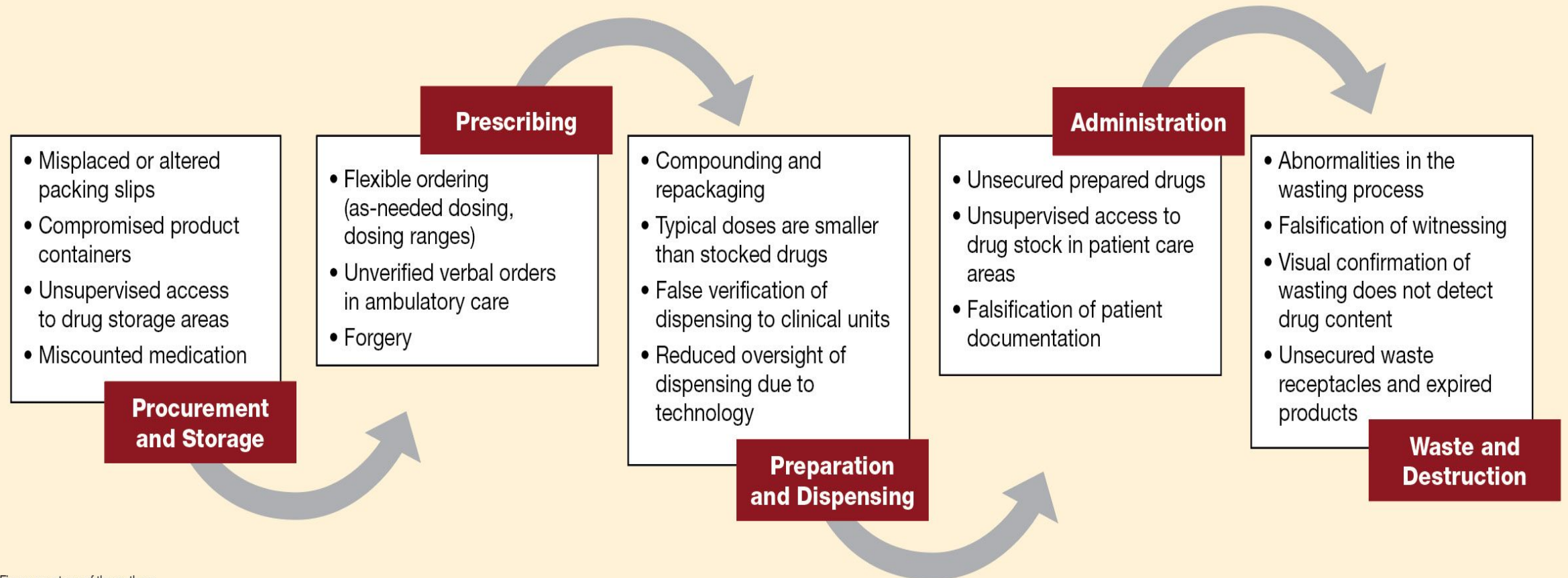



Figure courtesy of the authors



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- Drug diversion among healthcare workers is **substantially underestimated, undetected, and underreported.**(ANA, 2022)
- Hazard with legal and financial implications that threaten patients, medical facilities, healthcare workers, and the public.
- Awareness and recognition are the first steps to prevention.




## Prevention of Drug Diversion in the Healthcare Setting

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# Drug Diversion Triad

## Drug Diversion Triad





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# Commonly diverted drugs



## Medical Marijuana



Remedi

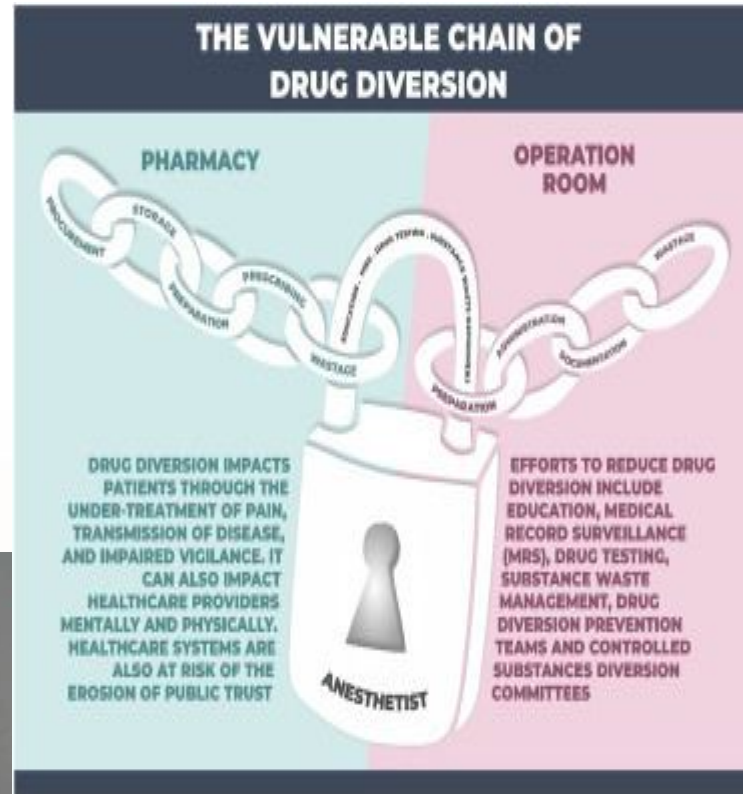
Healthcare with a difference!





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# Commonly diverted drugs



*Healthcare with a difference!*





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*Healthcare with a difference!*

# Methods for drug diversion

- Stealing syringes or vials and ampoules
- Under-dosing patients
- Replacing controlled substances with another product, such as saline
- Taking PRN medications from patients or pulling duplicate doses
- Creating false verbal orders
- Failing to waste or document waste
- Alteration of Anesthetic gases
- Raiding sharps containers.



# Common Reasons to Suspect Diversion

- Physical evidence such as a syringe, needles and ampoules in the staff bathroom /changing rooms/ lockers
- A patient complaint of refractory pain
- A count discrepancy or loss of controlled drugs (Opioids)
- Blood on scrubs around arms or legs
- The reason why diverters frequently present not as visible addicts or troubled employees but star employees, is that they need the hospital to be their source for medication.
- “So, by helping nurses, by coming in early, by staying late, by offering to give other nurses’ medications to their patients, they’re staying near the source.”





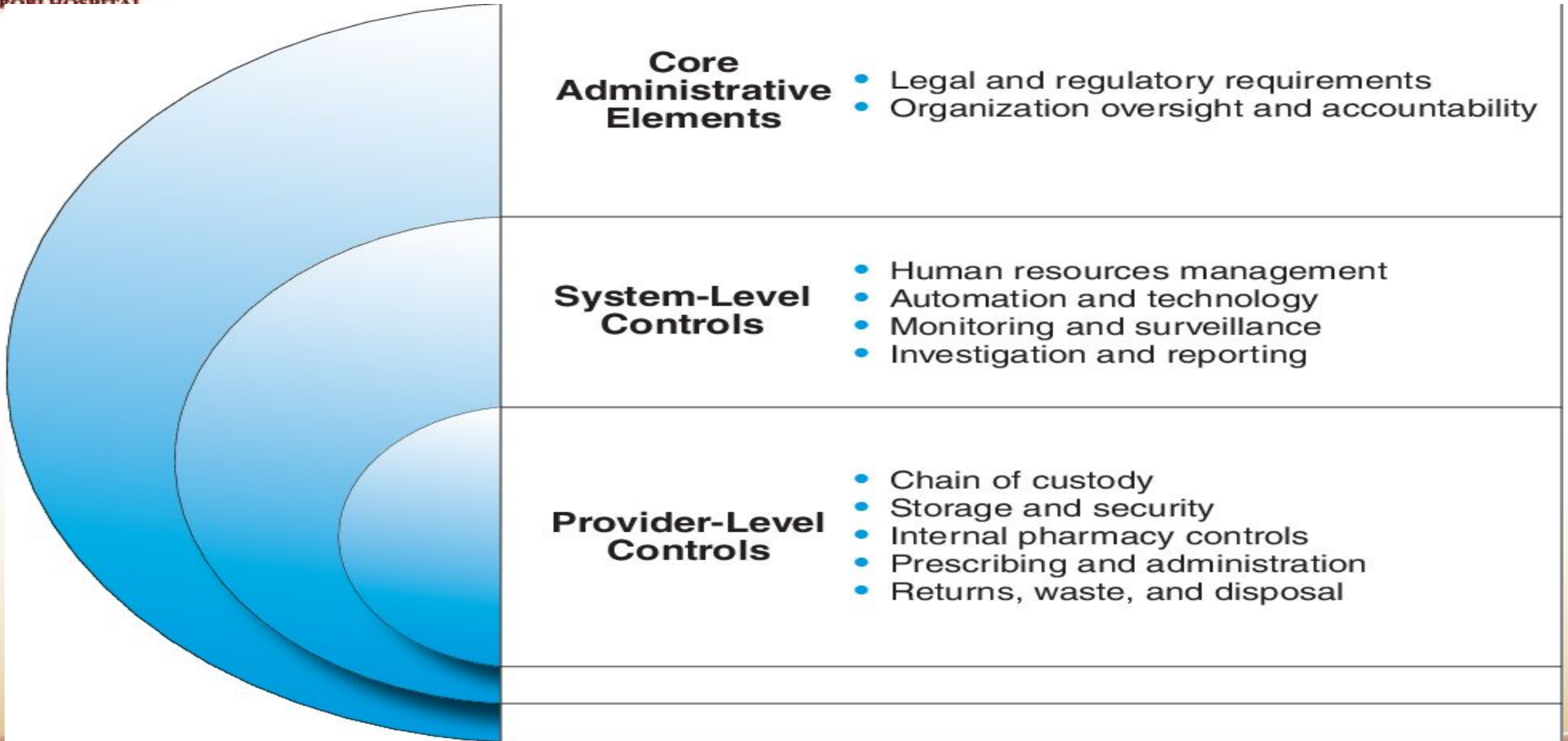
# Signs and Symptoms of impairment

Work Changes	Behavior Changes	Physical Changes
Increased absences	Mood swings	Pupil changes
Team member complaints	Increased or decreased energy	Slurred speech
Incomplete documentation	Lies or forgets parts of conversations	Tremors
Only does what is necessary	Complains of pain	Sleepiness
Increased medication errors	Poor concentration	Sweaty
Patient complaints	Always wore short sleeved shirts, now long sleeved	Weight loss
Decreased interaction with peers	Talks about a new set of friends	Disheveled appearance
Leaves the unit frequently during shift	Paranoia	Teary eyes



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# Guidelines to prevent Diversion of Drugs





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# Prevention of diversion

Stage of Medication-Use Process	Safeguard Policy
Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Separate purchasing and receiving roles</li></ul>
Storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implement clear auditing trails of access to controlled substances</li><li>• Limit access to controlled substance inventory</li></ul>
Prescribing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continually monitoring order process.</li><li>• Identify patterns and prescription forgery</li></ul>
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eliminate repacking controlled substances. Only use single dose packages</li></ul>
Dispensing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keep a comprehensive log of all dispensing activity</li><li>• Reduce unnecessary supply</li></ul>
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reduce opportunities for diversion between drug withdrawal and administration</li><li>• Ensure clinical documentation accurately captures access and administration patterns</li></ul>
Waste, return & disposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enforce wastage witnessing and documentation</li><li>• Secure wasted and expired drugs</li></ul>





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# Summary

- Drug diversion is a **patient safety** issue,
- A patient **privacy issue** (e.g., patient records are inappropriately accessed to identify opportunities for diversion)
- **Occupational health** issue given the higher risk of opioid-related SUD faced by HCWs
- A **regulatory compliance** and a **legal issue**.
- **Educational imperative** -Students and staff on risk factors, behaviors to foster recognition of Drug diversion
- **Prevention measures** include improving the workplace environment, assuring adherence to preventative workflows/processes



# References

- Nolan K, Zullo AR, Bosco E, et al. Controlled substance diversion in health systems: a failure modes and effects analysis for prevention. Am J Health-Syst Pharm. 2019;76:1158-1164
- RN.org. Drug Diversion and Best Prescriptive Practices.
- Institute for Safe Medication Practices. Best practices for the safe and cost-effective management of controlled substances.
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