

## Medication Safety Officer

Tremendous improvements in medication safety have been made in the past two decades however, new therapeutics, emerging technologies, complex drug management systems, changes in staffing patterns and workflows continue to pose significant challenges. In addition, external factors such as drug shortages as well as competing demands from regulatory agencies, accrediting bodies, third-party payors, and patients substantially impact error prevention measures. While reducing medication errors remains a top priority for most health care executives, they often do not have adequate time to devote to this issue. To alleviate this hurdle, many hospitals have created a Medication Safety Officer (MSO) position.

An MSO is a dedicated clinical advocate with specific education, authority, and leadership skills to serve as the organization's expert in safe medication practices. Qualified pharmacists, nurses, physicians and physician assistants may fill this role with titles such as medication safety leader, medication safety manager, medication safety coordinator, medication safety clinical specialist, or director of medication safety. This responsibility does not fall solely on the shoulders of the MSO but is shared among all health care practitioners who procure, prescribe, prepare, dispense, administer, and monitor medications. However, the MSO has the ability to affect change from the top, to ensure the organization learns from medication risks and errors, and to implement high-level strategies. An MSO can interact with frontline clinicians to champion past safety achievements, making them more widespread and sustainable.

An effective MSO possesses detailed knowledge of the science of patient safety and reliability, quality improvement principles, human factors, Just Culture, event investigation, system design, medication-related technologies, error-reduction strategies, change management, and medication safety measurements. They should also have an in-depth understanding of the entire medication use process and the ethics of transparency and disclosure. The position of the MSO requires strong communication, interpersonal, and leadership skills. They should be innovative and visionary, and they must have the ability to influence the behavior of others.

There are nine essential MSO roles that are critical to success:

1. **Champion and Diplomat** – the MSO should be visible and present on clinical units to listen to staff regarding current practices.
2. **Information Steward and Communicator** – as an expert on safe medication practices, the MSO may conduct literature searches on best practices, participate in safety research projects, disseminate new information to staff, write a medication safety-related newsletter or organize educational programs.
3. **Strategist and Influencer** – the MSO prioritizes medication safety as a core value for individual clinicians and the organization. The MSO may present evidence for specific strategies to executive leaders, board members, and medical staff.
4. **Ethical Negotiator** – as a leader, the MSO must maintain ethics, transparency, and disclosure in order to foster trust and to promote error reporting.

### Reference

1. Institute for Safe Medication Practices. (2021). *Nurse Advise-ERR*. Retrieved from Institute for Safe Medication Practices: <https://www.ismp.org/nursing/medication-safety-alert-april-2021>

5. **Cross-discipline Team Leader** – the MSO must have the ability to work along the chain of command and across various clinical departments.
6. **Data Optimizer** – the MSO must investigate medication error-reporting data and assess whether strategies are having a positive impact. The MSO may participate in root cause analysis (RCA), analyze medication-related technology data (i.e. from infusion pumps, bar-coding technology, automated dispensing cabinets) in order to develop and implement effective action plans.
7. **Proactive Facilitator** – the MSO should proactively identify medication risks that can lead to patient harm, investigate the causes, and implement risk-reduction plans.
8. **Compassionate Just Culture Mentor** – the MSO must develop trust in order to advise others to make behavioral choices that are consistent with the organization’s culture and values. The MSO should encourage the reporting of medication errors, console staff who make medication errors, and help redesign medication use systems to reduce or eliminate errors. The MSO may help develop, conduct, or report the results of an organization-wide culture survey. The MSO may also assist in determining if a mistake is due to human error, at-risk behavior, or reckless behavior and advise the manager on how to respond.
9. **Agent of Change** – the MSO works to identify and understand challenges to medication safety, creatively problem-solve, and drive solutions into practice.

The MSO should be a member of the leadership team with full authority to act and remove barriers to change. The MSO position should also have complete support of the executive team.

#### Reference

1. Institute for Safe Medication Practices. (2021). *Nurse Advise-ERR*. Retrieved from Institute for Safe Medication Practices: <https://www.ismp.org/nursing/medication-safety-alert-april-2021>