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Ensuring Good Storage and Distribution Practices to Protect the Quality of Health Supplies

The International Rescue Committee's self-assessment tool is keeping warehouses compliant with international storage standards.

Supply chain managers must have an overall strategy for commodity warehousing to maintain the quality of health products in emergency and crisis situations. Good warehousing ensures the physical integrity of products and their packaging through the chain of storage facilities to the point of being dispensed to clients. Quality assurance (QA) in warehouses is typically monitored by reviewing compliance with the World Health Organization's (WHO) Good Storage and Distribution Practices (GSDP).

BACKGROUND

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) responds to some of the world's worst humanitarian crises, including those in Ukraine and Afghanistan. Globally, IRC manages 79 warehouses that deliver health supplies to refugees, internally displaced people, and host communities.

PRACTICE

Annual warehouse self-assessments are part of IRC's continuous monitoring and improvement of all aspects of pharmaceutical quality management. IRC developed an assessment tool that measures compliance with WHO GSDP within IRC's pharmaceutical supply chain and provides data for generating corrective and preventive actions.

Processes, resources, and staff are key aspects of quality management. By focusing on these, IRC ensures compliance of warehousing and inventory control practices, establishing a transparent and standardized medical supply QA system based on international and WHO guidelines.

IRC incorporates risk management principles with clear roles and responsibilities, standardized procedures and tools, and ongoing training programs for key personnel. It routinely examines its warehousing systems to manage deviations and ensure that corrective and preventive actions are adhered to, and sets performance indicators to monitor the effectiveness of its warehousing practices. The annual warehouse assessment constitutes a formal process and tool for reviewing the pharmaceutical quality system, and its guidance and support structure sets the standard for IRC programs.

Local teams of at least two people, usually the country pharmacist and the warehouse officer responsible for the facility, conduct the self-assessments in IRC medical warehouses. The assessments are monitored centrally by the global supply chain senior manager and the pharma QA team. The self-assessment questionnaire covers various GSDP areas with requirements classified as either essential or best practice, and the team scores each requirement as critical, major, or minor. Deviation from any essential requirement is considered a gap and scored as critical.



Photo: IRC

Hamza Sarieddine, senior manager for pharmaceutical QA, supports IRC's warehouse self-assessments to improve the management of pharmaceutical and medical products.

Location: Global

Organization: International Rescue Committee

Setting: Refugees and vulnerable communities

Supply chain management practice area: Warehousing and distribution

HR cadres involved: Supply chain, pharmacy, and warehouse managers

This series of learning briefs focuses on health supply chain practices that can be implemented by humanitarian partners to resolve common challenges and improve the delivery of pharmaceutical and medical commodities.

IRC evaluates compliance with GSDP standards based on the following scores:






	Critical: An essential requirement that is NOT implemented. For example, a deviation from GSDP resulting in a pharmaceutical causing significant risk to a patient and public health.
	Major: An essential requirement that is not fully implemented or a best practice requirement that is not implemented. For example, a major deviation from GSDP that adversely influences product quality but does not affect a patient's health.
	Minor: Best practice requirement that is not implemented. For example, a GSDP deficiency that cannot be classified as critical or major.

Table 1. Gap Analysis for Determining GSDP Deviations

Rationale		
Weighting		
		GSDP Requirements
Total questions		Essential
		Best Practice
Answers	FI	Fully Implemented
	PI	Partially Implemented
	NI	Not Implemented
	N/A	Not applicable
Decision Matrix		
+	PI	NI
Essential	Major	Critical
Best Practice	Minor	Major

After the pharma QA team has evaluated the self-assessment, it sends a report card to the country office, listing the number of critical, major, and minor deviations. The benchmark for a passing score is that the warehouse has no critical findings or five or fewer major gaps. In response to the report card, the country pharmacy manager develops and implements a corrective and preventive action plan.

Key Lessons Learned

- Provide resources, including personnel, facilities, equipment, materials, and time, to implement and maintain compliance with GSDP.
- Build the capacity of quality management teams and provide technical support to fill warehousing and storage gaps. This includes clearly defined job descriptions and regular training.
- Develop written procedures and instructions to ensure that materials are held in accordance with their labeling and regulatory requirements.
- Have a monitoring system in place and advocate to fund gaps that require additional support.

By conducting annual warehouse self-assessments in all its country offices, IRC ensures compliance with WHO GSDP standards across the organization. Its focus on quality management and capacity building supports the goal of protecting the quality of pharmaceuticals until they reach patients. Many international nongovernmental organizations use similar assessment tools and are collaborating to standardize them across organizations.



PRACTICE AREA ESSENTIALS

Warehousing and distribution

The physical management of products, through various levels of an in-country supply chain, must be conducted in a way that ensures products are protected from harmful environmental conditions or handling and remain accessible and in good condition; and that this management poses no risk of injury to workers.

The supply chain manager needs to know:

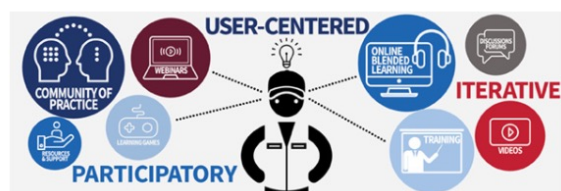
- How to carry out key warehousing activities of receiving, storage, and shipping
- How to plan warehouse space requirements and warehouse layout
- How to monitor compliance with WHO GSDP

Learn more about [warehousing and distribution](#)

[Access the full version of the Supply Chain Manager's Handbook](#)

[WHO good storage and distribution practices for medical products](#)

Building Capacity to Improve Pharmaceutical and Medical Commodity Management in Humanitarian and Disaster Settings Project



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