



Opioid-refiner: Pharmacy and Drug Health join forces to transition Opioid Treatment Program medicines access



Andrea Nguyen^{1,2,3}, Rosemary Burke², Sophie Dai³, Matthew Cowley³, Jocelyn Ong³, Jason Trinh³
Russell Levy⁴, Mikhail Martin⁴, Sandra Maria Pita Santos¹, Garry Soo¹, Andra Ronis¹

¹Concord Repatriation General Hospital, Sydney, Australia. ²Sydney Local Health District, Sydney, Australia. ³Canterbury Hospital, Sydney, Australia. ⁴Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney, Australia.



Background

From the 1st of July 2023 with the support of the Commonwealth, Opioid Treatment Program (OTP) medicines were listed under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) as part of the Section 100 Highly Specialised Drugs Program. This included methadone oral liquid, buprenorphine sublingual tablets, buprenorphine + naloxone sublingual films and long-acting buprenorphine injections. This transition created a need for pharmacy hospital departments' involvement and initiative to introduce PBS dispensing and claiming workflows using the i.Pharmacy dispensing system to drug health clinics unfamiliar with i.Pharmacy. This provided an exciting opportunity for collaboration and education between pharmacy and drug health departments across inter-district hospitals in metropolitan Sydney.

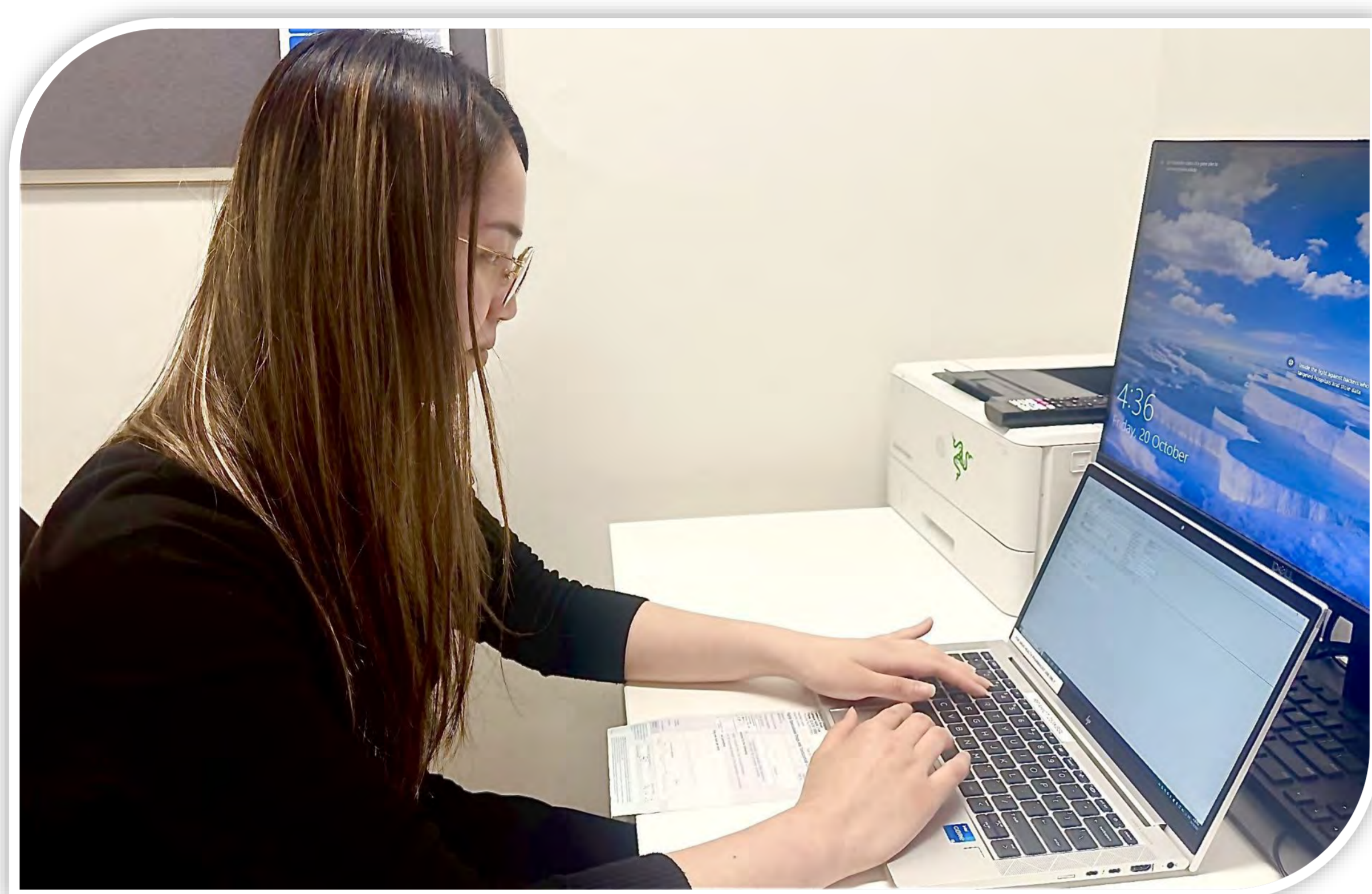


Figure 1. Drug Health Pharmacist processing a PBS S100 prescription for an Opioid Treatment Program medicine on the i.Pharmacy system

Objective

To set up a system for drug health to order, dispense and claim OTP medications under the PBS and educate drug health staff including pharmacists, nurses and doctors to incorporate these processes into existing workflows.

Action

Initially, key pharmacy staff set out to engage drug health clinics and to observe the existing workflows for patient supply and administration of OTP medicines. A proposed workflow was discussed and agreed upon in collaboration with pharmacy and drug health. This workflow was modelled in the i.Pharmacy system and drug health pharmacists were trained to carry out these processes in the dispensing system. Additionally, the drug health pharmacists worked closely with the pharmacy ordering team and pharmacists managing PBS claiming. The drug health pharmacist and doctor provided education about PBS prescribing to drug health prescribers. A tracking system of paid stock usage was developed by drug health pharmacists.

Evaluation

Monthly reports produced by the i.Pharmacy system are used to evaluate and compare stock purchasing, dispensing, PBS claiming and disposals of OTP medicines for drug health.

As of the week ending on the 20th October 2023:

3 Drug Health Pharmacists trained on i.Pharmacy processes for PBS dispensing and stock management

597 OTP medicine benefit items have been processed under the PBS S100 Highly Specialised Drugs Program

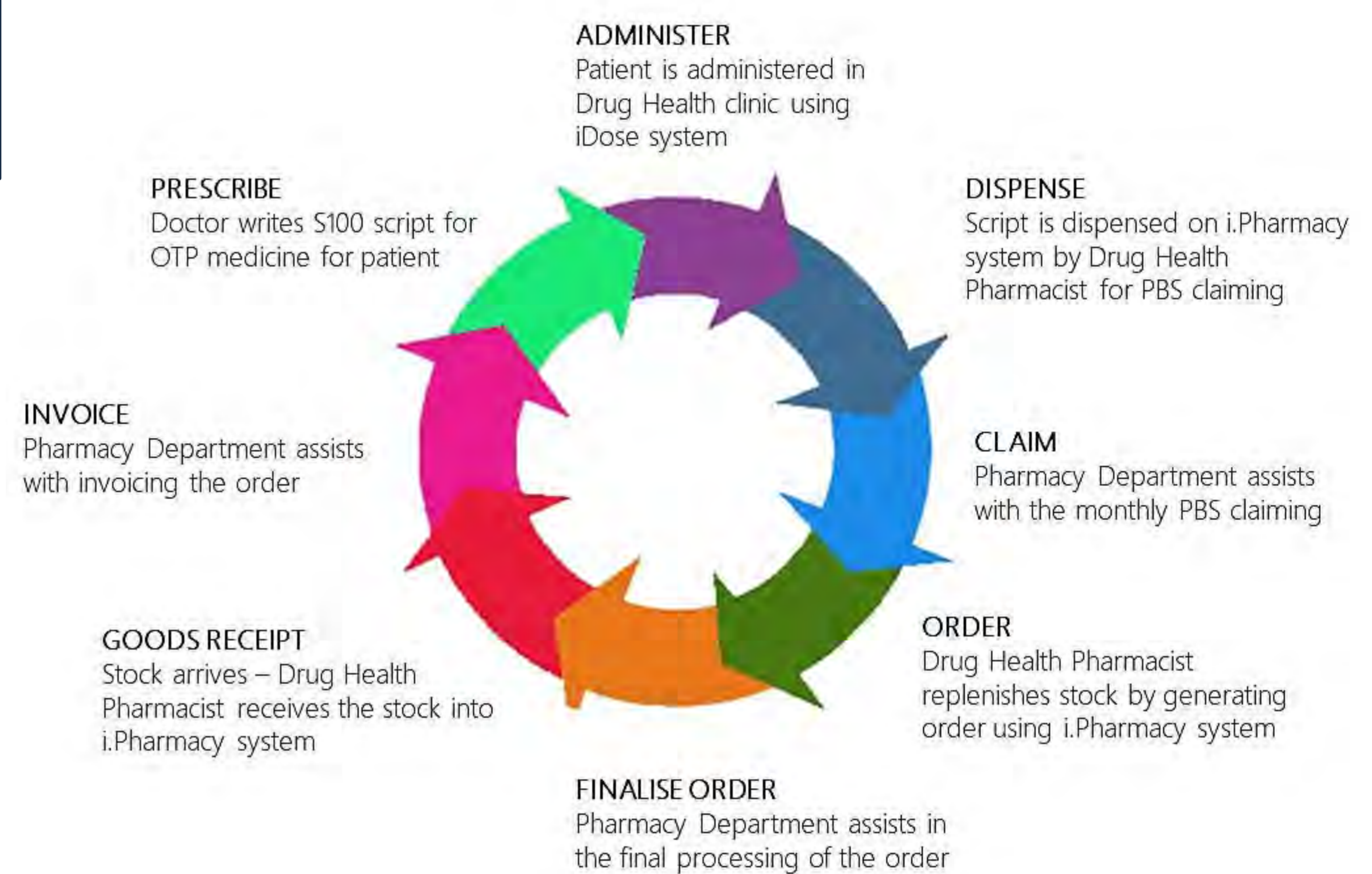


Figure 2. Process of accessing OTP medicines under the PBS S100 Highly Specialised Drugs Program

Discussion

This transition highlighted the vital need for education, active engagement and collaboration between Pharmacy departments and Drug Health staff (including pharmacists, nurses, doctors and administrative clerks). The development of clearly defined processes assisted Drug Health staff familiarise the steps involved in PBS claiming and stock management for OTP medicines. Following the early implementation, the review and adaptation of these processes facilitated the smoother transition.

Conclusion

Active engagement and collaboration between pharmacy and external departments can promote effective working relationships to promote cost minimisation, patient access to specialised medicines and ultimately, a great move to providing services consistent nationally.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Katherine Nguyen, Emma On, Bass Nalamphun, Linh Thai, Ali Makki and Jina Yoon for their support and hard work in this program.