

Medications warehousing – not your average storeroom



By Leslie Morgan
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In the last issue of *Middle East Health* I wrote about the challenge of transporting fridge lines from one corner of the world to the other. Following on from that, I think it's also interesting to consider why the correct warehouse storage conditions are equally as important. After all, it's no good paying for a refrigerated container or a satellite-tracked truck full of fridge lines to ensure ideal storage conditions during the journey if the pre-journey storage conditions in the warehouse weren't monitored as well.

Like any company that makes or transports medicines and medical equipment, the warehouse is at the very heart of Durbin. And it's far from being just a big storage space to stack and unpack boxes. Rather, it is a highly controlled environment with perfect conditions to suit the varying needs of the different products.

A good warehouse has three different temperature zones. The first, and usually the largest, is the main warehouse where products are stored below 25°C. The second zone, essentially a large walk-in fridge, is referred to as the 'cold room' where medicines that need to be kept between 2-8°C are stored. The third is the freezer for items that need to be kept below minus 20°C.

The temperature of each zone is monitored every few minutes and there's an alarm

system in place to warn staff if the temperature rises or falls outside the recommended range – officially known as an 'excursion'. Temperature graphs are printed out and reviewed seven days a week, 365 days a year – senior managers are on call 24 hours a day. At regular intervals, a process known as 'temperature mapping' takes place throughout the whole warehouse. This is where the temperature is taken at several locations to ensure consistency. Annually, the temperature logging system is calibrated and validated. Finally, our warehouse is regularly inspected by the MHRA (Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency) – an executive agency of the British Department of Health.

And even though the temperature in the warehouse is religiously controlled, other systems are also in place to guarantee that the cold chain doesn't get broken. When new products arrive in the warehouse, they are checked with a temperature probe to

confirm that conditions during the journey were maintained. Also, there's space in each cold room to unpack and store fridge line medicines. In other words, these products are actually unpacked in the cold room.

Before products leave the warehouse, standard packing procedures are used depending on whether the journey will take 24, 72 or 96 hours. If possible, Durbin recommends sending out fridge lines early in the week to avoid boxes sitting on airport tarmacs or in warehouses in transit during the weekend. Also, our Responsible Pharmacist carries out regular packing tests on different items to determine the ideal storage conditions – both in the warehouse and during transportation – depending on the weather and storage or journey time.

Durbin couldn't be more serious about storage. Why not ask a few questions to check whether your supplier is too? ■

Durbin PLC is a British company based in South Harrow, London. Established in 1963, the company specialises in supplying quality assured pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and consumable supplies to healthcare professionals and aid agencies in over 140 countries. As well as reacting rapidly to emergency situations, Durbin PLC responds to healthcare supply needs from local project level to national scale programmes. Web address: www.durbin.co.uk Email: L.morgan@durbin.co.uk