

Help!

We've been robbed

Tips on avoiding a break-in and what to do if you're unlucky



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Despite the fact that crime statistics have been decreasing for violent offences in Canada over the past five years, pharmacies continue to be a target for both break-and-enters and robberies. The reason is simple: pharmacies stock a commodity that perpetrators of these crimes want—narcotics. An inventory of high grade, high quality, addictive and abusive narcotics makes your business a target.

Experience has shown that the most successful security strategies rely on a combination of deterrence, detection and delay tactics applied in that order. Failure to employ any of these reduces your chances of preventing a break-in or robbery.

In the March/April 2008 *Pharmacy Connection* article, “Securing Your Pharmacy,” a number of points were outlined to help decrease the likelihood of your pharmacy becoming a target of crime. Some of these include Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), video surveillance, store security systems, and proper securing of narcotics and controlled drugs. The article is available on the College’s website at www.ocpinfo.com

What if, despite your best efforts, your pharmacy does get robbed? Imagine that you are working diligently behind the counter or farther back, in the dispensary. The day has been slow, with very few patients coming in. As you

go about your business you hear a sound, or perhaps see a person approach. You walk over to investigate, and encounter an armed intruder demanding you hand over all your “oxy’s” or you are going to get hurt. Do you know what to do or how to act? Does your staff?

If you have difficulty answering these questions in the affirmative, then it may be time to acquaint yourself with your local police service and work with them to develop a plan for situations such as this. Your safety and that of your staff is paramount. Neither the money in the cash register nor the narcotics in the safe are worth your getting injured. Your local police service has officers willing and able to provide you with useful information, including pamphlets that could assist you in preparing a safety plan.

Some tips to remember during a robbery:

- Remain calm.
- Do not try to be a hero – your personal safety is paramount.
- Obey the robber’s commands.
- Do not antagonize the robber.
- Consider all firearms to be loaded.
- Look at the robbers – notice details to aid you in describing them and their mannerisms. Note age, weight, clothing, tattoos, scars, accents, hair colour or length.
- Take note of the weapon.
- Watch the direction the robbers take on leaving– if they use a vehicle, try to see the license plate and write down the number immediately.

After a robbery, you should:

Call police immediately (911) and give your name and the phone number and address of the pharmacy as well as a description of the suspect(s), direction of travel, and license number. Specify whether or not weapons were used.

- Write down all information immediately–do not rely on your memory.
- Protect the crime scene. Keep customers and other employees away from the area of the pharmacy where the robbery occurred.

- If your pharmacy is so equipped, secure any video surveillance that may have captured the robbery or the identity of the suspect.
- Ask witnesses to wait until police arrive (or get their names, phone numbers, and addresses). Lock the door until police arrive
- Do not touch anything.
- Save any notes that were used–do not handle them or let others touch them.
- Cooperate with the police—they are there to help you.

Similarly, if your pharmacy has been broken into:

- Call police (911); give your name and the phone number and address of the pharmacy.
- Protect the crime scene–do not touch anything.
- Secure any video surveillance footage, if you have it.
- Lock the door until police arrive.

All of these steps and more can be accessed through a majority of the municipal, regional and provincial police services websites. Simply search under “police services” and your municipality’s name.

After a robbery or a break-in, you will have to conduct a narcotic/controlled drug inventory count to determine what drugs have been stolen and in what quantities. This is where regular documented counts are invaluable. You cannot always trust the perpetual inventory which may be found on your computer system. Nothing can replace a manual count. With such a count and information such as N/CD purchase records and a drug usage report, you can determine the amount of medication which should be in stock and then calculate how much is missing. Any theft of narcotics and controlled drugs must be reported to the Office of Controlled Substances in Ottawa within 10 days of the loss.

A break-in or a robbery can be a traumatic experience for everyone involved. With some planning and preparation, you and your staff can be well equipped to handle either of these situations. Staying calm and focused will help you get through the event and will assist the police in apprehending the perpetrators. 