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## **Michigan Pharmacists Association’s Workplace Task Force White Paper Presents Recommendations for Improving Patient Safety and Reporting**

Lansing, Mich.—It is well documented in patient safety literature that the fear of reprisal or reprimand negatively impacts medication error reporting, challenging improvements to patient safety. According to the Institutes of Medicine, medication errors accounted for one of out every 131 patient deaths and one out of every 854 deaths. These deaths ultimately accounted for an estimated 7,000 deaths annually that can be attributed to medication related errors. Because there currently exists no statewide regulatory body that provides guidance on the paths of disciplinary actions for pharmacy professionals who find they are involved in a medication error, it is the goal of the Michigan Pharmacists Association (MPA) Workplace Task Force’s White Paper to request that regulatory bodies consider a “just culture” approach when assessing and addressing medication errors.

A just culture approach asks that the managers, when assessing the medication error, consider whether or not it is an issue with the employee or the process. If an employee, while following the standard of work, makes an error that would be repeated by another individual of similar experience also following the standard of work, the fault is not with the individual worker but with the process. In instances such as these, no punitive action would be taken against the employee as the reporting of the error provides an opportunity to restructure the process to prevent future errors. Although many healthcare institutions approach care with just culture in mind, it is not currently part of many states’ statutes and regulations, creating a conflict between long held standards and improving patient care.

The MPA Workplace Task Force is comprised of MPA members, who represent pharmacists and pharmacy technicians from all practice settings of pharmacy, including community, health-system, health plans and consultants. The primary goal of the Task Force is to identify and recommend best practices and strategies that can be implemented in the practice setting to minimize the potential for the workplace environment to contribute to medication errors.

Ghada Abdallah, R.Ph. and chair of the Task Force states that the biggest motivation behind the Workplace Task Force was, “to make the pharmacy a safer place for both pharmacists and patients. A large scale pharmacy can be an intimidating and overwhelming experience for both patients and employees, and by focusing attentions on the work environment, we are able to address and discuss solutions to process problems present in many practice settings.” Abdallah continued to say the biggest challenge to a just culture approach is, “changing the behavior of those working in the pharmacy. Many workers find it hard to admit they are part of the process resulting in a mistake. It’s about changing the culture of denial from, ‘every man for himself,’ to ‘we’re all in this together.’ This is necessary to move any pharmacy forward and ensure the patients’ needs are met in the safest way possible.”

Larry Wagenknecht, Task Force member and MPA chief executive officer said, “Patient and medication safety is one of the top priorities for pharmacists, regardless of the pharmacy setting they practice. The goal of this white paper is to identify different strategies and processes pharmacists and pharmacy technicians can implement into their pharmacy practice workflows to improve medication safety. While there is not a single solution that will universally address all situations, there are meaningful activities within the pharmacy that pharmacy management, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians can take to lessen the risk of a serious medication error.”

Michigan Pharmacists Association, representing nearly 9,000 pharmacists and 15,000 pharmacy technicians in Michigan, strives to serve members by providing support, advocacy and resources that ultimately improve patient care, safety, health and the practice of pharmacy. For more information, and access to the White Paper, visit [www.MichiganPharmacists.org/patients/resources](http://www.MichiganPharmacists.org/patients/resources).