



Complaint Form

Today's Date: 9/28/2012

1. Your Name: 4 - Identity - Whistleblower Regarding Health Care Provider - RCW 43.70.075(1), RCW 42.56.070(1)
 Address: 4 - Identity - Whistleblower Regarding Health Care Provider - RCW 43.70.075(1), RCW 42.56.070(1)
 City: 4 - Identity - Whistleblower Regarding Health Care Provider - RCW 43.70.075(1), RCW 42.56.070(1)
 Phone: Work 4 - Identity - Whistleblower Regarding Health Care Provider - RCW 43.70.075(1), RCW 42.56.070(1)

2. Information about the Facility or Health Care Professional

Type of facility or profession: Pharmacy
 Name of facility or professional: Amro Abuhallah at Fred Meyer (19th + Stevens)
 Address: 4505 S 19th Street
 City: Tacoma State: WA Zip: 98405

3. Resident/Guest/Patient Information

Full Name (if different than above) "Roo" - canine patient owned by Kourtney Oti
 Date of Birth (of patient, if complaint involves a patient) 2/26/2006 (dog's birthday)
 Date of incident: 9/13/2012

4. Please describe your complaint in the space below. Include the name, title and phone number of other patients, witnesses or staff members involved in the incident. Email completed form to the Customer Service Center at HSQAComplaintIntake@doh.wa.gov, or fax to 360.236.2626, or mail to:

Washington State Department of Health
 Health Systems Quality Assurance
 Complaint Intake
 P.O. Box 47857
 Olympia WA 98504-7857

For Department of Health Use Only			
Reviewed for multiple authority applications:	Date	Name	Date
Routed to: Multi-authority coordinator:	Office	Office	Office
Office	Office	Office	Office
Office	Office	Office	Office

Please attach any supporting documentation and additional sheets if necessary.

For Department of Health Use only

Reviewed for multiple authority applications:	Date _____	Name _____
Routed to: Multi-authority coordinator:		date _____
Office: _____		date _____
Office: _____		date _____
Office: _____		date _____

28 September 2012

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Washington State Department of Health
Health Systems Quality Assurance
Complaint Intake
P.O. Box 47857
Olympia, WA 98504-7857
F: 360-236-2626

To Whom it May Concern:

Re: Formal complaint about Amro Abuhallah, pharmacist at Fred Meyer, Tacoma (19th & Stevens)

On 9/12/2012, my patient "Roo", a 97 pound Chesapeake Bay Retriever, owned by Kourtney Ott, had a surgery performed on his knee to stabilize it after having fully ruptured his cruciate ligament. Part of Roo's post-operative care involves strict rest so that he does not cause damage to his knee during the healing process. When I spoke with Kourtney's boyfriend Jeff the day after surgery, he informed me that he was concerned that Roo was being too active. Based on the fact that Roo seemed to have a degree of separation anxiety, I decided that an anxiolytic drug would be the best way to keep him calm. I decided on diazepam and informed Jeff that because of Roo's large size I did not have tablets big enough so he would need to pick them up from a human pharmacy. He asked me to call it in to the Fred Meyer pharmacy on 19th and Stevens in Tacoma. My technician called in the prescription as I directed at 3:24 pm. The prescription was for 10mg Diazepam, 2-4 tablets every 8-12 hours as needed. I prescribed a quantity of 60 tablets with one refill because this animal's rehabilitation period when he needs to be inactive on his knee is 8-12 weeks. Additionally, this is the low to middle end dose for a canine patient as described in Plumb's veterinary handbook, 7th edition, which states that for "situational anxiety, as a psychotherapeutic agent" the dose of diazepam is 0.55-2.2 mg/kg PO q 8-12 hours. My dose was for 0.5-1mg/kg in my patient.

The following day, 9/14/2012, I received a phone call from Jeff, who told me that Kourtney went to pick up the diazepam the night before. She was counseled by pharmacist Amro Abuhallah, who told her that the dose I prescribed was too high, that *it could kill their dog*, and it may cause respiratory arrest. Although the prescription label reads exactly as I had prescribed, this understandably caused Kourtney and Jeff to be very concerned. Mr Abuhallah recommended that they give Roo *one-quarter of a tablet every 12 hours* and that "that should be plenty". He also recommended that she only take half as many pills because at ¼ tablet every 12 hours, they would have far too many pills. Because they picked up the

diazepam after we were closed, Jeff and Kourtney were unable to reach me, so they took only 30 tablets home, and gave Roo the ¼ tablet (2.5mg total dose). It of course did nothing to keep Roo calm. They gave him another ½ tablet a few hours later, which still did not seem to do anything. At this point, they investigated on the internet to find out that a 10 pound cat could be given 5mg routinely, and realized that Mr Abuhallah's recommendations were wrong and that my dosing had been correct.

When I spoke with Jeff, I told him I was familiar with diazepam dosing being very different between canines and humans since my own husband who weighs close to 200 pounds was prescribed only 5 mg. While he was still on the phone, I double checked my dosing, and instructed him to go ahead and give Roo the 2 full tablets (20mg). I then thanked him for telling me, as I would otherwise have no way of knowing that this type of thing is going on with my patients.

At this time, I called the WSVMA and spoke with Candace Joy because I had received a fax the previous week stating that the changing of prescriptions by pharmacists for veterinary species has been a growing concern, and I made her aware of the issue. I asked if she thought I should contact the pharmacist or if I should let her take the matter to the Board of Pharmacy only, and she told me that she thought it would be a good idea, even if just to inform the pharmacist that the dosing is different in dogs and ask him to contact me first before making changes like this.

My next phone call was to the Fred Meyer pharmacy. I first spoke with a female pharmacist who told me that Mr Abuhallah had stepped out and would be back in 15 minutes. She wondered if the clients had misunderstood his counsel, as often happens. I called Kourtney to hear the story directly from her, which basically confirmed what Jeff had already told me, and I then called the pharmacy back about an hour later to speak with Mr Abuhallah himself.

My intent was mainly to inform Mr Abuhallah that the dosing is indeed very different in veterinary species, especially for this medication, to ask him not to instill such fear into my clients as to say "this can kill your dog", and to please call me if he has concerns, especially of that magnitude, before instructing my clients to change the dosing on a prescription. Mr Abuhallah told me that my dose was too high. He said that he has filled diazepam prescriptions for veterinarians many times and he has never filled one as high as mine. "Forty milligrams is too high for an adult," he said to me. I countered that it is not. He repeated, "Forty milligrams is too high for an adult".

"An adult *human*," I said to him. "This is a dog."

I told him that he should have called me to check my dosing if he was concerned about it. I said he should not have changed my prescription.

"I did not change your prescription," he said.

"Yes, you did."

"No, I did not."

I admitted that certainly the label that went home with the owner was as I had prescribed it but he instructed my clients incorrectly, and told them that my care could kill their dog. He said he did not have to answer to me about his counsel of patients. I asked him, "by what law?". He said he knew what he was talking about. I asked if he was a veterinarian, and he replied, "No, I am a pharmacist. I know drugs." At this point, it was an argument, and there was clearly no resolution that was going to occur. I told him I would just have to contact the Board.

I have several concerns with this situation.

1. If this had indeed been prescribed incorrectly, Mr Abuhallah should have made an effort to contact me directly to address those concerns. The prescription had been called in to the pharmacy while we were still open, even if the owners did not pick up the meds until after we closed. If it had been an issue or a concern for him, that should have been addressed, at the time they filled the diazepam, long before the owners came to get their dog's medication.
2. Using words like "this can kill your dog" are big words, and those are the kinds of things that could instill doubt into my clients regarding my abilities and competence. I did not appreciate that type of comment when this man obviously did not check his sources.
3. The fact that Mr Abuhallah has apparently filled diazepam for multiple dogs means nothing. Other patients may have been 5 pound Yorkshire Terriers. A prescription does not carry any information regarding the body weight of the animal, nor does it give an indication for why this animal needs the drug, or for the length of time it may require it.
4. When I called to speak with Mr Abuhallah directly, my intent was merely to request that he not make such brazen accusations about me, or any health professional for that matter, to our clients, to please call me with questions about prescriptions he thinks may be wrong, and to simply point out that the dosing is absolutely different for veterinary species than it is for humans so that he would not make the mistake again. He was absolutely defiant. He had no intention to even consider that he may have been wrong, and he made no effort to make an apology. Clearly he did not make any effort to check his sources, and he was making recommendations based on false information.
5. Had this dog been too active, as was possible while he was so far underdosed on his diazepam, he could have drastically damaged and compromised the surgery that had been performed, one that my clients paid \$2500 for.
6. If my clients had not called me, a little embarrassed and concerned, I would not have known this had happened. It makes me very apprehensive and suspicious about doing any form of written prescription moving forward because I do not have the faith that every pharmacist will call me first before defaming my name or potentially causing harm to my patients based on false information.

In summary, this situation clearly upsets and concerns me. I am not at all interested in ruining this man's life or necessarily having his license revoked unless this is a pattern. However, he needs to understand that when it comes to veterinary species, he absolutely does NOT know everything about drugs, and when a veterinarian calls him to question something that he has done, he should be open to

listening and hopefully learning from his mistake. Mr Abuhallah is the manager at this particular Fred Meyer Pharmacy. I certainly hope this is not the example by which he chooses to lead his team.

I look forward to your response and a resolution in this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me. If needed, I can provide the address and phone number of the owners as witnesses. Please let me know if you need this information. I have included a copy of the chart notes as they are written in Roo's medical record.

Manv thanks

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