

# One Team, One Call: Transforming Outpatient Pharmacy Communication

**Dahlia Sultan, PharmD, CSP**

Assistant Director, Ambulatory Clinical Pharmacy Services  
University of Chicago Medicine

**Horieh Pourmandi, PharmD**

Pharmacy Operations Coordinator, UCMC Pharmacy Call Center,  
University of Chicago Medicine

September 17, 2026



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Disclosure

- The speakers have no conflicts of interest with ineligible companies to disclose.



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

## Learning Objectives:

- Describe the purpose and structure of a centralized pharmacy call center across Retail, Mail and Specialty pharmacy services
- Outline the roles and responsibilities performed by centralized pharmacy call center staff
- Identify key operational metrics used to evaluate centralized pharmacy call center performance



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Assessment

## **Current State:**

- How are calls handled today by each call center?
  - Call volumes, locations/teams receiving calls, workflows, pain points, transfers, wait times, abandonment rates, and variation between departments

## **Future-State Scope:**

- Which services and call types should be centralized?
- Which work should remain with the individual departments?



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Analysis



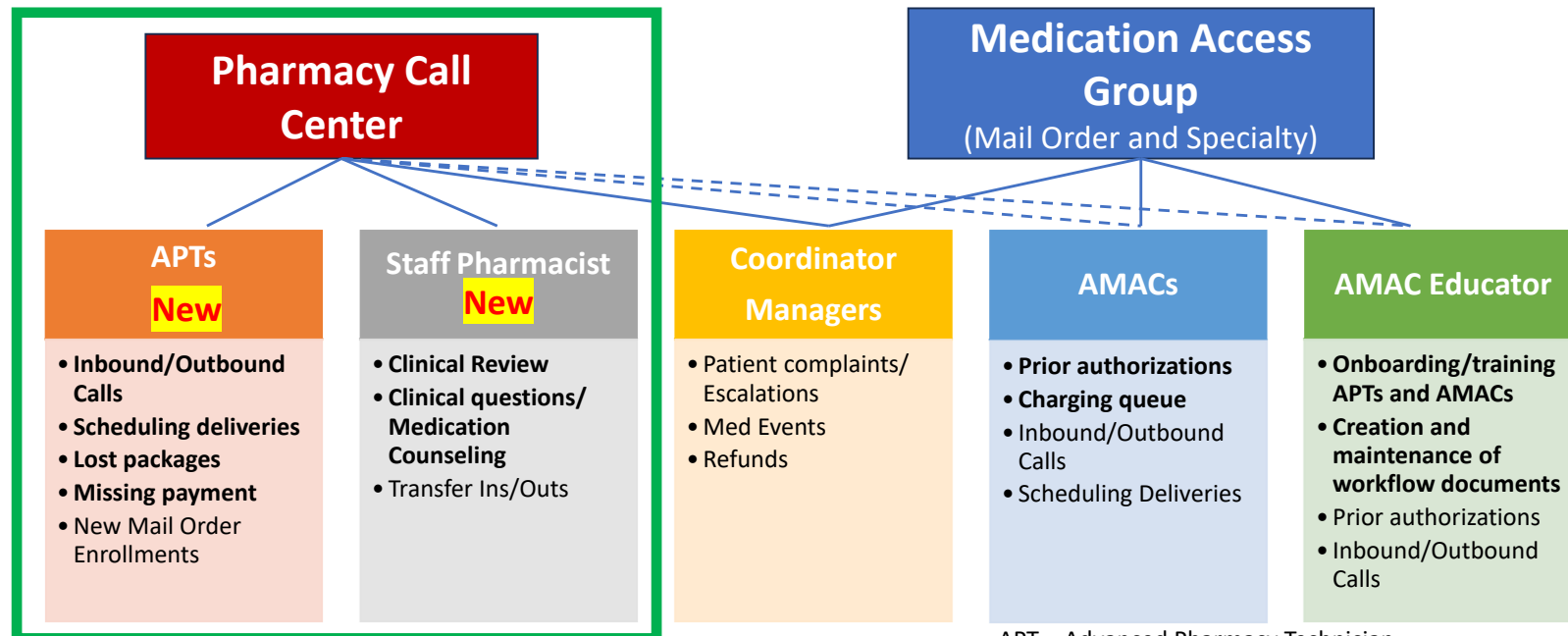
## Goals of the Pharmacy Call Center:

- Improve patient experience
- Create efficiencies
- Increase team engagement
- Optimize roles
- Create Flexible workforce
- Support pharmacy growth



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Staffing and Roles



APT = Advanced Pharmacy Technician

AMAC = Ambulatory Medication Access Coordinator



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Call Routing and Queue Management

**Call Queues:** A virtual waiting line that organizes incoming calls based on the type of service or assistance needed. Calls remain in the queue until an appropriate agent is available to handle them.

- **Call Queues**
  - Mail
  - Retail
  - Specialty
- **Dequeued:** Call goes to voicemail after specified time if no agents are available
- **Call Back Queue(New):** If calls are not handled within specified time, patient is given the option to receive a call back when an agent is available

**Skill:** A capability or qualification assigned to an agent that identifies the types of calls they are trained and authorized to handle. Skills can be used to route calls to the most appropriate available agent.

- **Dedicated Skills:** Agents are assigned only to their primary area (AMAC)
- **Cross-Skilled Agents:** Agents are trained to support multiple queues (APTs)
- **Primary + Secondary Skills:** Agents have a primary queue but can support another when needed

**Multiple queues can be supported by a shared pool of agents with different skill assignments, allowing staffing resources to be used more flexibly.**



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Technology Capabilities

## Agent

- Unified Agent Interface/Desktop App
- Call Management
- Agent Status Management

## Agent/Manager

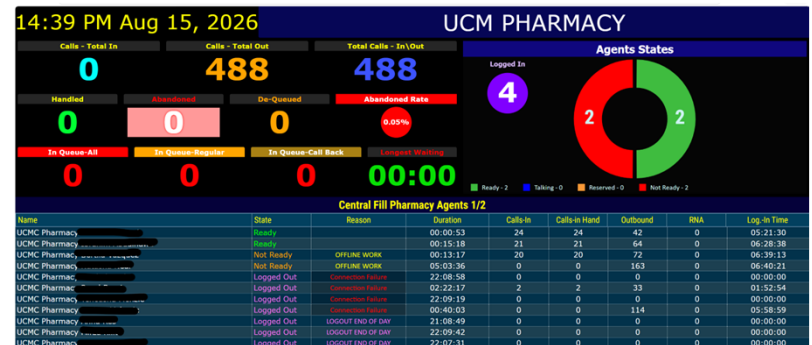
- Queue Monitoring
- Real-time Dashboards

## Manager

- Reporting & Analytics
- Call Recording
- EHR/System Integration

UCM Pharmacy

| Agent Name   | State                       | Time in State | Extension | Actions |
|--------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-----------|---------|
| UCM Pharmacy | Wrap-Up                     | 00:00:00      | 56718     | ***     |
| UCM Pharmacy | Not Ready - Out To Lunch    | 00:41:14      | 55825     | ***     |
| UCM Pharmacy | Ready                       | 00:00:00      | 59907     | ***     |
| UCM Pharmacy | Not Ready - Offline Work    | 00:00:44      | 54523     | ***     |
| UCM Pharmacy | Not Ready - Out To Lunch    | 00:07:08      | 50143     | ***     |
| UCM Pharmacy | Not Ready - Out To Lunch    | 00:07:52      | 51316     | ***     |
| UCM Pharmacy | Not Ready - After Call Work | 00:06:56      | 56504     | ***     |
| UCM Pharmacy | Not Ready - Out To Lunch    | 01:04:48      | 1996236   | ***     |
| UCM Pharmacy | Talking                     | 00:00:39      | 56274     | ***     |
| UCM Pharmacy | Talking                     | 00:04:45      | 58554     | ***     |
| UCM Pharmacy | Talking                     | 00:01:36      | 50362     | ***     |



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

## Self-Assessment Question 1

**Which statement best describes how skills are used in a call center environment?**

- A. Skills are use to store voicemails until an agent becomes available
- B. Skills identify the types of calls an agent is trained and authorized to handle, helping route calls to the most appropriate available agent
- C. Skills automatically place callers into the same queue regardless of their needs
- D. Skills determine how long a caller must wait before being connected to an agent



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Standardized Workflows

## SOP Development

- Workflow documents for respective areas
- Standard scripts and communication
- Defined escalation pathways
- Consistent documentation
- Call dispositioning

## Training and Competency

- Development of competency checklist
- Continuous improvement



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Performance and Reporting



## Measure

- Call Queue Performance
- Agent Performance



## Monitor

- Patient/Service Experience



## Evaluate

- Operational & Strategic Reporting



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Call Queue Performance

**Call Presented**: Calls that are sent to the agent, regardless of whether the agent picks up the call

**Calls Handled**: Number of Calls handled by this CSQ (each call center). A call is handled if a caller is connected to an agent while queued for this CSQ

**Speed of Answer**: Average answer speed = Total queue time / Calls handled

**Calls Abandoned**: Number of calls that routed to CSQ (each call center) but are not answered by an agent because the caller hung up or disconnected

**Abandonment Rate**: Percentage of calls that were abandoned

(Number of calls abandoned / Number of calls presented ) / 100%

**Calls Dequeued**: Number of calls that are queued for CSQ and then dequeued by the Dequeue step in a workflow



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

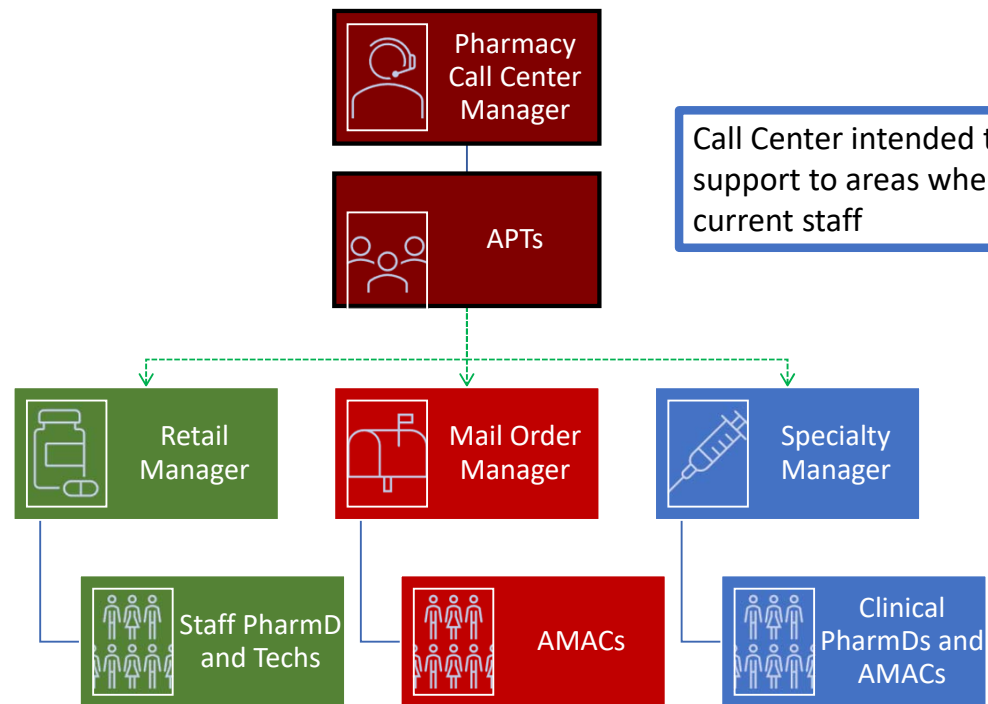
# Agent Performance

- **Handle Time**: Handle time = Talk time + Hold Time + work time (After Call Work – Not ready)
- **Hold Time**: Time that the agent puts the calls on hold



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Operational Oversight & Continuous Improvement



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

## Self-Assessment Question 2

**A call is routed to a Call Queue, waits in line, but the caller hangs up before speaking with an agent. How is this call classified?**

- A. Calls Presented
- B. Calls Handled
- C. Calls Abandoned
- D. Calls Dequeued



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Outpatient Pharmacy Services

**Hours of Operations:**

|          | Mail Order   | Retail    | Specialty    | Call Center  |
|----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|--------------|
| Mon-Fri  | 8 AM-5:30 PM | 7 AM-7 PM | 8 AM-5:30 PM | 8 AM-5:30 PM |
| Saturday | --           | 7 AM-3 PM | --           | --           |

**Daily Volume:**

|               | Mail Order | Retail | Specialty |
|---------------|------------|--------|-----------|
| Prescriptions | 650        | 900    | 200       |
| Phone Calls   | 300        | 375    | 175       |

\*\*Data is from Aug 2024-Jan 2025



# Baseline Operational Metrics by Call Center

| Call Center Metric (Avg 6 months) | Goal    | Mail Order | Retail | Specialty |
|-----------------------------------|---------|------------|--------|-----------|
| Calls Presented                   |         | 6,500      | 8,500  | 3,400     |
| Calls Handled                     |         | 6,400      | 7,500  | 3,100     |
| <b>Abandonment Rate</b>           | <5%     | 1.8%       | 9.2%   | 3.4%      |
| Time to Abandon                   |         | 1:07       | 2:39   | 1:08      |
| <b>Calls Dequeued</b>             | <2%     | 0.4%       | 2.2%   | 3.7%      |
| Time to Dequeued                  |         | 2:35       | 3:15   | 1:02      |
| <b>Speed of Answer</b>            | <30 sec | 0:17       | 1:13   | 0:23      |
| Handle Time                       |         | 3:12       | 2:09   | 3:59      |

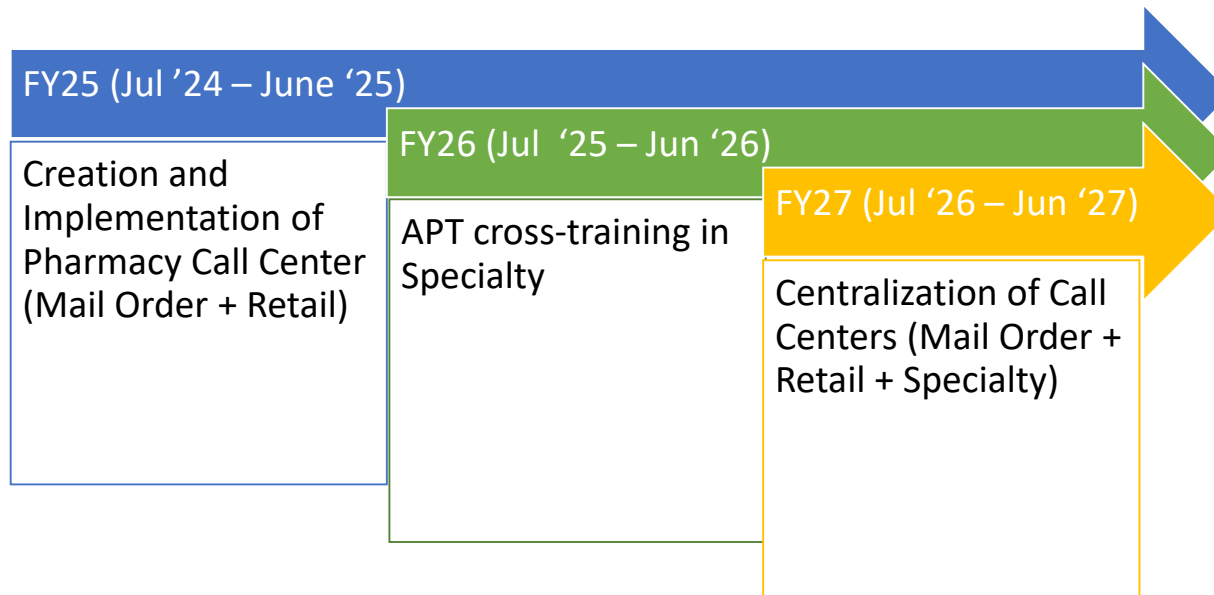
\*\*Data is from Aug 2024-Jan 2025



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

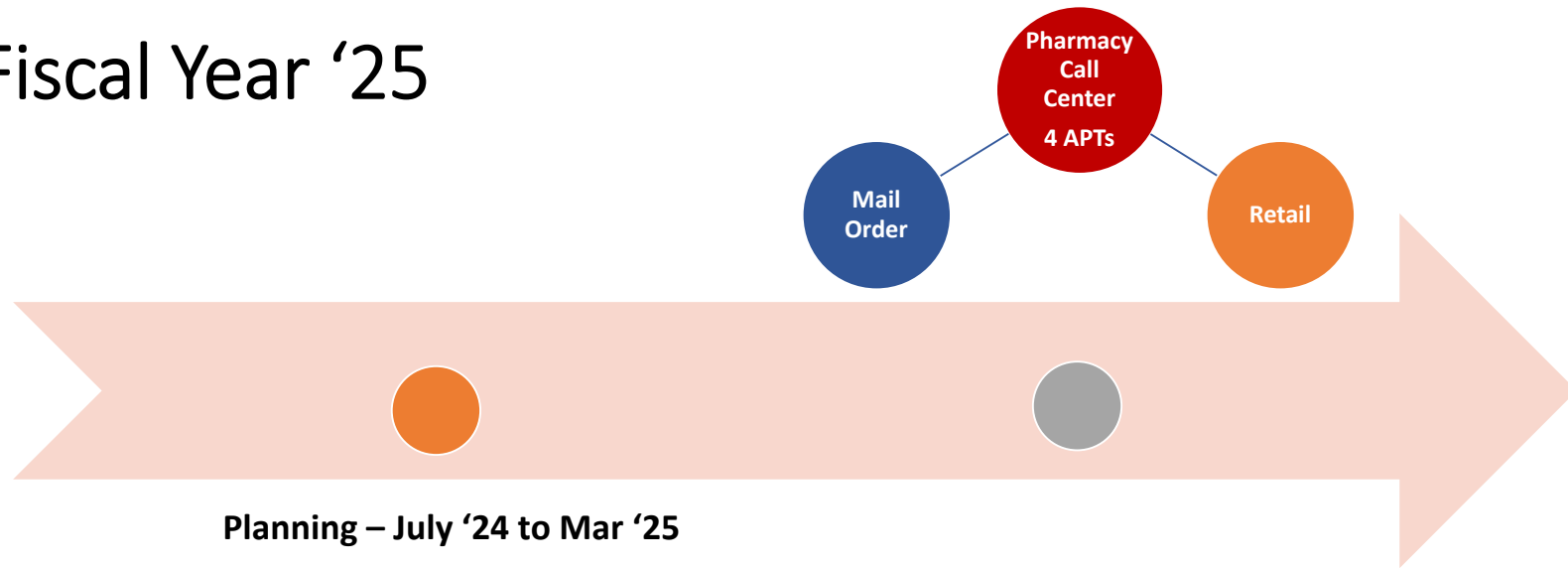
CONFIDENTIAL AND PRIVILEGED

# Pharmacy Call Center Timeline



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Fiscal Year '25



## Planning – July '24 to Mar '25

- Developed APT role
- Hired APTs
- Hired full-time staff pharmacist
- Delineation of responsibilities amongst different roles
- Creation of centralized staffing model
- Developed training materials
- System build with Phone Informatics

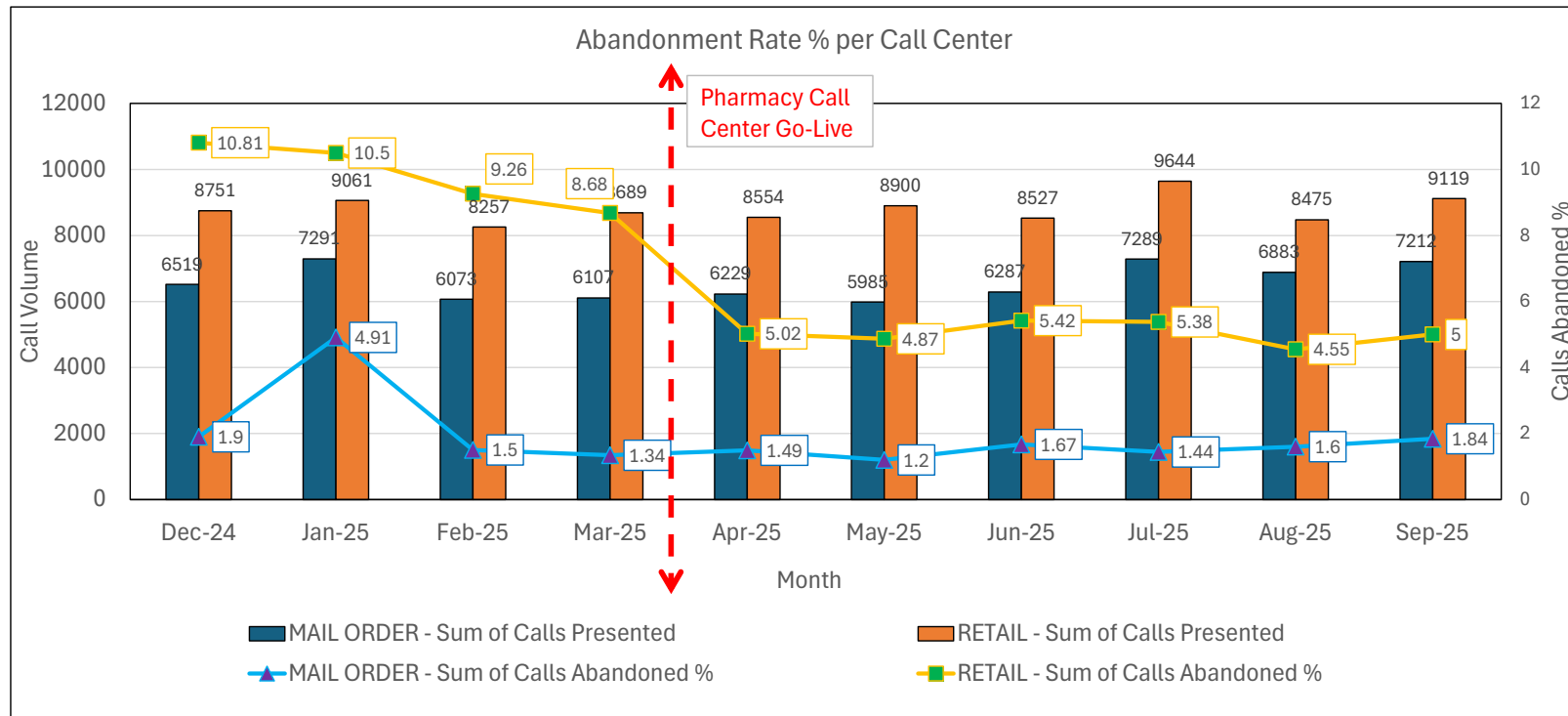
## Go-Live – Apr '25

- Start Staffing Mail Order & Retail
- APT Staffing Model: 50/50 Coverage
- Track Call Center Performance Metrics
- Track user metrics



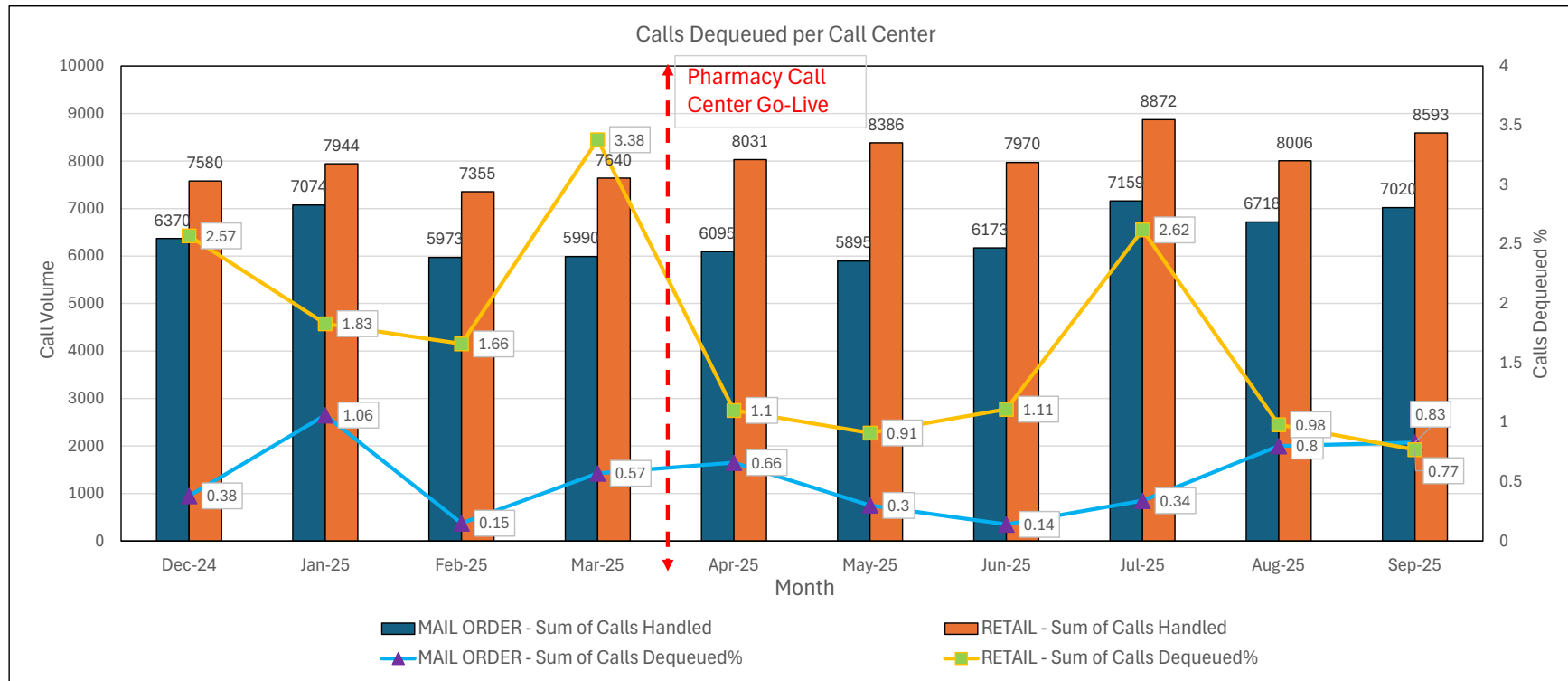
**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Abandonment Rate %



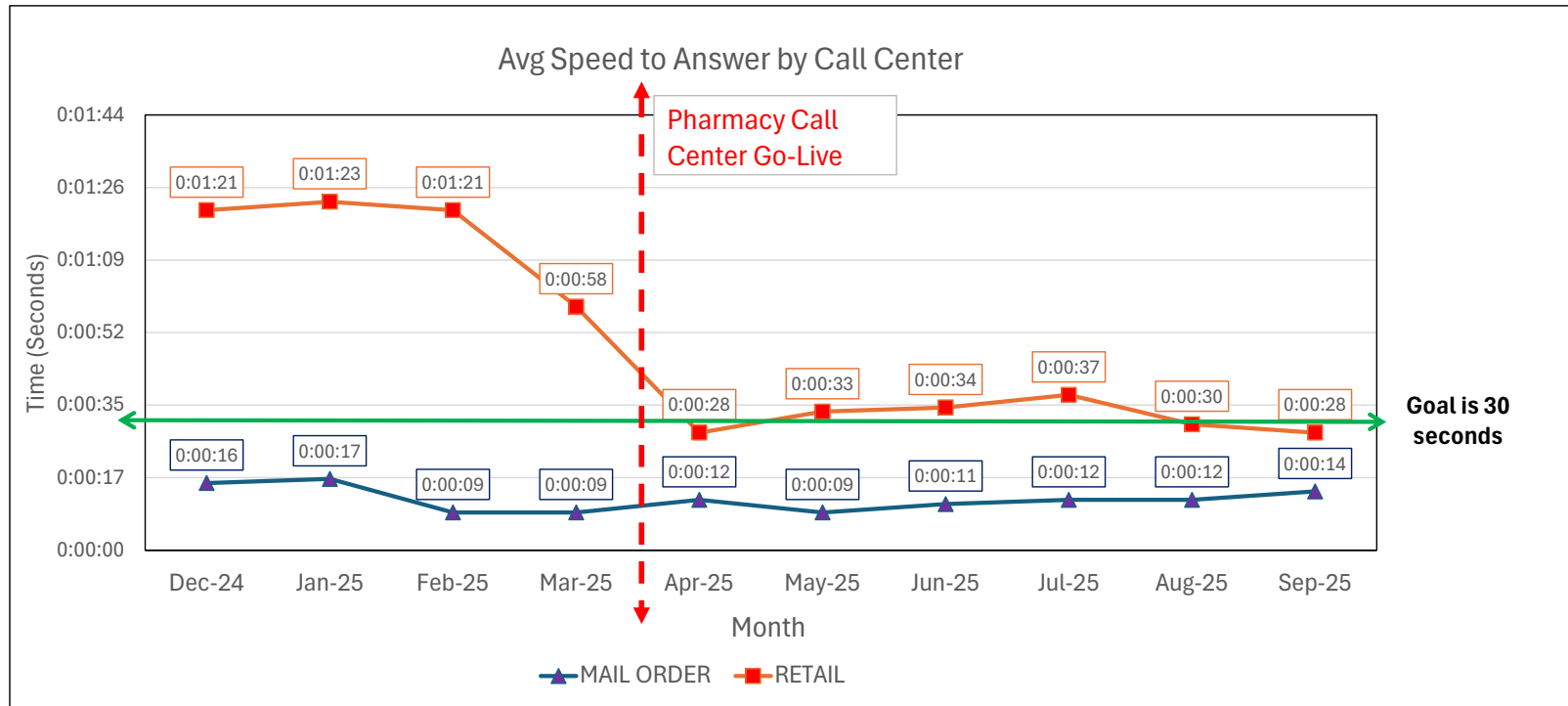
**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Calls Dequeued %



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Average Speed to Answer



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

## Baseline Operational Metrics by Call Center

| Call Center Metric<br>(Avg 6 months) | Goal    | Mail Order | Retail | Specialty |
|--------------------------------------|---------|------------|--------|-----------|
| Calls Presented                      |         | 6,500      | 8,500  | 3,400     |
| Calls Handled                        |         | 6,400      | 7,500  | 3,100     |
| <b>Abandonment Rate</b>              | <5%     | 1.8%       | 9.2%   | 3.4%      |
| Time to Abandon                      |         | 1:07       | 2:39   | 1:08      |
| <b>Calls Dequeued</b>                | <2%     | 0.4%       | 2.2%   | 3.7%      |
| Time to Dequeued                     |         | 2:35       | 3:15   | 1:02      |
| <b>Speed to Answer</b>               | <30 sec | 0:17       | 1:13   | 0:23      |
| Handle Time                          |         | 3:12       | 2:09   | 3:59      |

\*\*Data is from Aug 2024-Jan 2025

CONFIDENTIAL AND PRIVILEGED

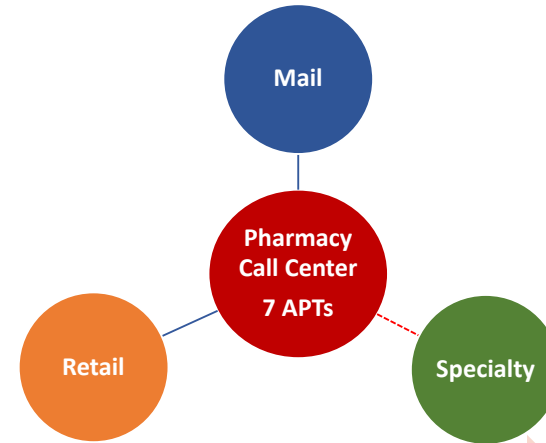


**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Fiscal Year '26

## Planning – May '25 to Sept '25

Cross-Trained APT in Specialty  
Delineation of Responsibilities  
Developed training materials  
Assessing specialty call metrics



## Go-Live – Oct '25

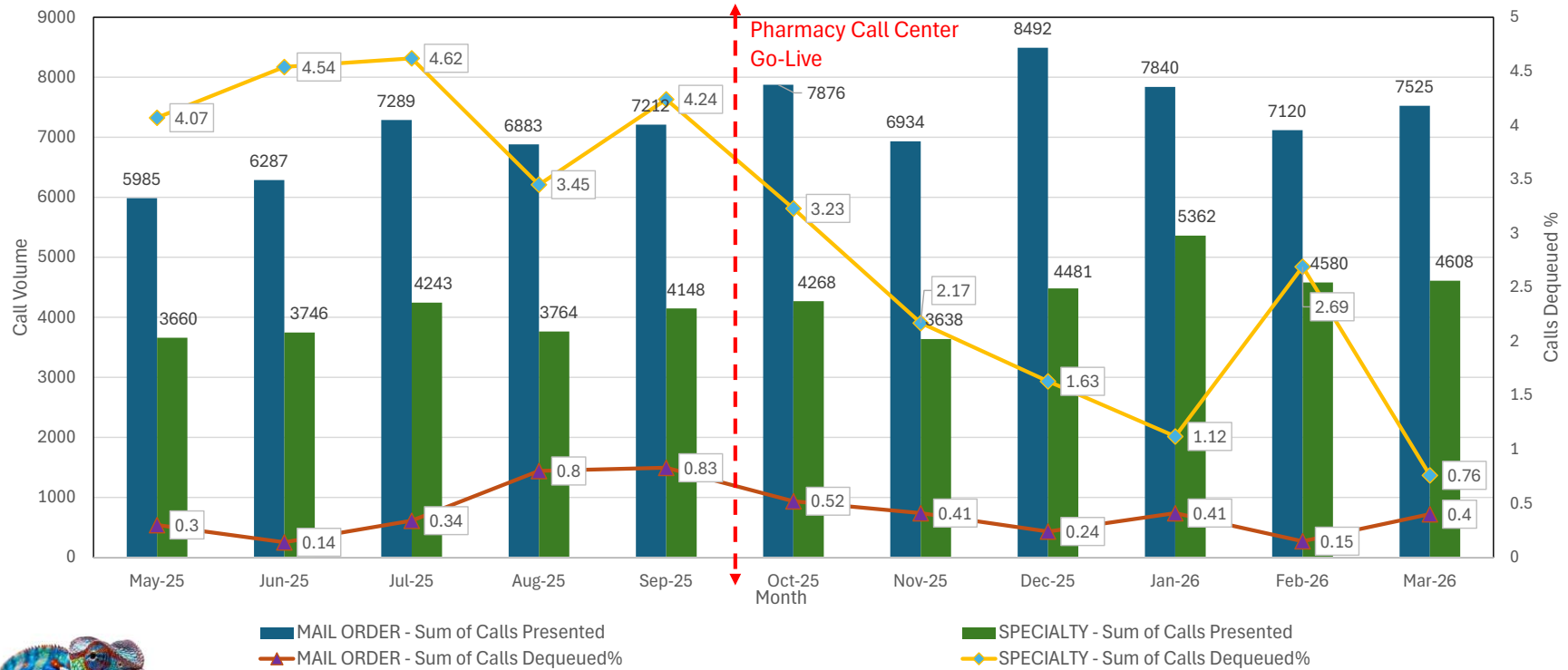
Start staffing specialty call center  
Decompressing specialty pharmacy team  
phone coverages  
Track and trend metrics



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Calls Dequeued %

Calls Dequeued % for Each Call Center



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Impact of Pharmacy Call Center

## Direct:

- Measure impact of APTs on individual call centers

## Indirect:

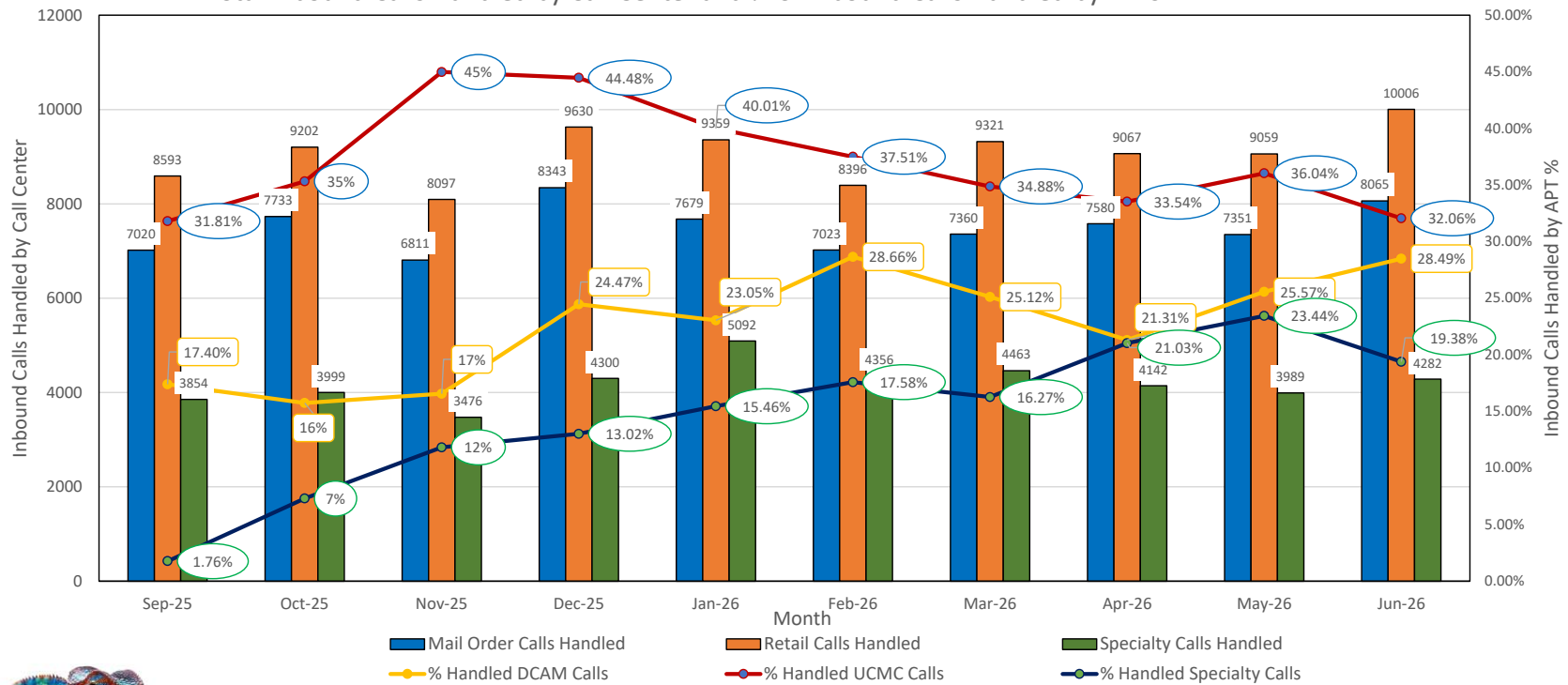
- Impact on other roles
  - AMACs – increase in medication access support
  - Clinical Pharmacists – increase in patient care activities



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Calls Handled by Call Center APTs

Total Inbound Calls Handled by Call Center and % of Inbound Calls Handled by APTs



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

## Self-Assessment Question 3

**Which of the following is NOT identified a key component of centralized call center?**

- A. Staffing & Roles
- B. Standardized Workflows
- C. Call Routing & Queue Management
- D. Inventory Management



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# Continuous Improvement – Fiscal Year '27

## Training:

- Continue cross-training current APTs on specialty pharmacy workflows
- Integrate specialty pharmacy into the centralized call center model

## Workload:

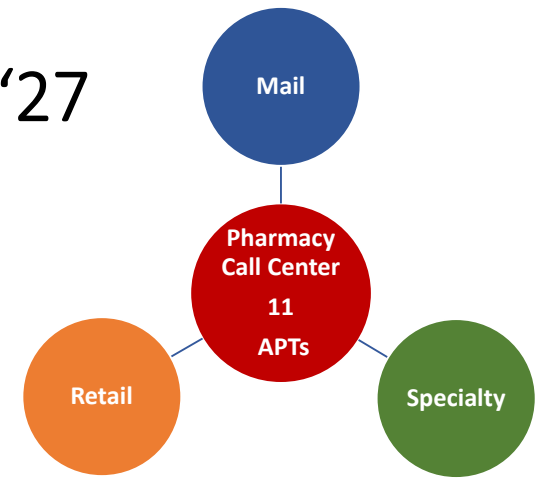
- Assess workload and staffing capacity across each operational area
- Shift responsibilities as needed based on workload and area-specific needs

## Performance & Patient Experience:

- Monitor employee performance and productivity
- Evaluate patient experience and service quality

## Reporting:

- Measure operational efficiency and scalability
- Establish monthly reporting to track quality, productivity, and outcomes



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

## Lessons Learned

- Training timelines vary by operational area
  - Specialty pharmacy training may require up to six weeks
- Staff turnover creates ongoing training and coverage challenges
- Collaboration with the hospital call center is needed to align workflows and best practices
- Standardization should allow flexibility for area-specific needs and workflows



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**

# One Team, One Call: Transforming Outpatient Pharmacy Communication

**Dahlia Sultan, PharmD, CSP,**  
Assistant Director, Ambulatory Clinical Pharmacy Services  
University of Chicago Medicine

**Horieh Pourmandi, PharmD,**  
Pharmacy Operations Coordinator, UCMC Pharmacy Call Center,  
University of Chicago Medicine

**September 17, 2026**



**2026 ICHP Annual Meeting**