

Automated Medicine Dispenser Offers Convenient Rx Pickup

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Similar to a bank ATM, Parata's prescription vending machine is offering patients at Med-Fast Pharmacy a new alternative in how they get their medications.

Med-Fast Pharmacy located inside the Shop 'n Save (Bethel Park, PA) has the distinction of being the first community pharmacy in the country to launch the Parata Automated Product Machine (APM).

The implementation of self-service technology in pharmacies gives individuals the option of when they pick up their prescriptions. The machine offers safe, secure, private self-service pickup for prescriptions 24 hours a day. It also reduces clutter and confusion at pickup and ensures more complete, accurate orders.

"Med-Fast wanted prescriptions to be available to customers 24 hours a day to fit with their lifestyles," said Gino Cordisco, RPh, director of store operations. The company saw the machine at a July 2007 trade show and, shortly after, purchased it. The prescription pickup station was deployed at the Bethel Park location in March. The site was chosen because it is a 24-hour grocery store, and customer surveys indicated that individuals in the area were in favor of the APM because they shopped late at night for groceries, he explained.



Med-Fast Pharmacy has 18 retail locations, a long-term care pharmacy, a compounding only pharmacy, and a Home Health Care division all located throughout Western Pennsylvania.

Located next to the pharmacy, the APM sits with one side accessible to employees behind the counter, and the other side is available to patients. The process for filling prescriptions has not changed with the implementation of the APM. Pharmacists still fill scripts called in by patients or physician offices or scripts dropped off. After the medications are verified, the bar-coded bags are then stapled to a plastic handle. The pharmacy staff scans the prescriptions into the pharmacy management system and loads them into the machine, which can hold up to 450 bags of medication. Bulk items or refrigerated medications cannot go into the machine.

In order to ensure privacy and accuracy, patients register at the pharmacy counter and receive an exclusive personal identification code. Using the special identification, a patient creates a personal identification number to use the machine to access their profile. The patient selects the medication(s) to be picked up. Before the medications are dispensed and paid for electronically, patients must accept or decline counseling by a pharmacist. If they elect counseling, the patients pick up a telephone on the machine and are connected with a Med-Fast pharmacist. If it is after the pharmacy closes, on-call pharmacists have remote capabilities that allow them to pull a copy of the scanned script and look at everything they need to counsel patients, explained Cordisco.

He stressed that patients receiving new prescriptions are given the option of counseling when they drop off the script and again when they pick it up. If the script is called in by the physician's office, the pharmacist calls the patient to offer counseling prior to filling the script and loading it into the machine.

The feedback from both patients and pharmacy staff has been positive. Patients enjoy the convenience, and the pharmacy department likes having the machine as an option for prescription pickup because it frees staff for patients on new or complex drug regimens or who want additional help with their health care needs.

"Med-Fast is leading the future vision of pharmacy, continually leveraging technology to meet and exceed customers' expectations for fast, accurate service, and access to their pharmacy team," said Tom Rhoads, Parata's executive vice president. "Parata is committed to helping pharmacies like Med-Fast make the transformation from fulfillers to providers with technology solutions that enhance



patient safety and convenience at key touch points. Parata APM plays an exciting part in that strategy by changing the way prescriptions are served to customers."

Cordisco said plans are in place to rollout APMs at other Med-Fast pharmacies after they get approval for pharmacy renovations and receive positive feedback from other pharmacy locations with a need for the technology.

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