

Kiosks are one answer for harried pharmacists

NEW YORK — With pharmacists increasingly strapped for time, kiosks that dispense medications are becoming more popular.

Asteres Inc. and Distributed Delivery Networks Corp. (DDN) have both created such ATM-style machines, which allow patients to log in and leave with their refill in less than a minute.

Asteres' ScriptCenter was introduced in four Longs Drugs Stores in California earlier this year. Safeway Inc. is also installing the machines in a number of its stores.

"At a time when an increasing number of consumers are choosing mail order, ScriptCenter brings them into the pharmacy and encourages them to talk directly to their pharmacist," says Linda Pinney, the founder and chief business officer of Asteres.

DDN chief executive officer William Holmes concurs, saying his company's kiosks do not present a threat to the relationship between pharmacy and patient but actually enhance it.

The automated kiosks are free and available even when the pharmacy is closed, which helps chain drug retailers, who are constantly seeking ways to provide convenience to their customers.

As for security, the ScriptCenter machines weigh over 1,400 pounds and come equipped with a camera to record all transactions.

"With the nationwide pharmacist shortage, we believe pharmacists can best spend their time counseling patients instead of mechanically handing out refills," says DDN's Holmes. "And these kiosks save them valuable time."