

Chain Drug Review

Reporter for the Chain Drug Store Industry

Automation impacts new realms

NEW YORK — Three suppliers to the retail pharmacy industry have developed separate products they say will dramatically change portions of the prescription-dispensing process.

Two of these suppliers have developed machines to expedite the prescription pickup process while the third is targeting prescription accuracy and authenticity.

Del Mar, Calif.-based Asteres Inc. and Distributed Delivery Networks Corp., a subsidiary of San Marcos, Calif.-based Amistar Corp., have each developed machines they claim will allow pharmacy patients to pick up and pay for prescriptions without assistance from a pharmacy staff member.

Meanwhile, Boulder, Colo.-based Analytical Spectral Devices Inc. (ASD) has received a patent for its RxSpec technology for verifying the chemical composition and dosage of a prescription drug.

Asteres' ScriptCenter and ddn's Automated Product Machine (APM) act as sort of

prescription drug vending machines. Customers enter data unique to their prescriptions into the units, select a payment method and receive their prescriptions, eliminating the need to stand in line and allowing for prescriptions to be picked up after a store has closed its pharmacy for the day.

For the most part, according to executives at both companies, the units are designed to be used for refills that do not require a patient to consult with a pharmacist. The machines, they say, meet the growing desire among consumers to use self-checkout devices.

"Forty-four percent of consumers say they would be more likely to shop at a store offering self-checkout than in stores that didn't, all else being equal," notes Asteres founder and chief business officer Linda Pinney.

According to Distributed Delivery president and chief executive officer William Holmes, the company's automated prescription units are

the first in what it expects to be a series of machines to increase customer service and loyalty while reducing store operating costs.

Both the ScriptCenter and the APM hold about 500 prescriptions. Both companies say the units can easily be interfaced with pharmacy systems.

While these machines are expected to streamline the pickup process, executives at ASD say their new device will ensure that the prescriptions being picked up include the correct drug and the proper dosage.

RxSpec, they say, uses a combined visible and near-infrared spectroscopy inspection system to directly check a prescription drug while it is in the dispensing vial. The real-time measurement is sensitive to chemical composition, color and dosage level.

The device is said to be the first tool to automate what ASD president and chief executive officer Dave Rzasa calls "the time-consuming and labor-intensive" manual verifi-

cation process employed in most pharmacies.

RxSpec can be integrated into a pharmacy's work flow, he notes, helping to free up the pharmacist to spend more time with patients.

The chemical fingerprint measured by RxSpec, Rzasa points out, is compared with a known database, providing a 100% assurance that the dispensed drug is correct in both type and concentration.

Unlike bar codes, which only identify a container label, ASD's device directly measures the drug itself, he says.

According to Rzasa, RxSpec helps especially in distinguishing between drugs that look alike or have different dosages and noting counterfeit drugs.

"RxSpec technology offers a way to directly measure a prescription drug as it is filled to ensure the correct drug and dosage are dispensed," says Rzasa. "Further, it is the only proofpositive manner to identify counterfeit drugs that look identical to real drugs."