

New Prescription Dispensing Machine Allows for After Hours Pick-ups

By Sandra Basu

WASHINGTON—Picking up medication refills at Los Angeles Air Force Base became a little more convenient for patients recently. A new prescription dispensing machine located at the base exchange means that beneficiaries are no longer limited to picking up their prescriptions during regular pharmacy hours.

The ScriptCenter Express Prescription Refill and Pickup Center was manufactured by Asteres Corp, and is the first remote pharmacy in LA County and the Department of Defense, according to Air Force Col Anita Latin, the 61st Air Base wing commander. “It is located at a base exchange where we have a lot of people go shopping,” she said.

Often, these types of systems are physically collocated with a pharmacy. At Los Angeles Air Force Base, however, officials decided that they needed to do something to ease the long waiting time patients often experienced when picking up their prescriptions. The base serves active duty servicemembers, family members, and over 200,000 retirees. “We dispense about 105,000 prescriptions a year, which is about 8,300 to 8,500 prescriptions a month,” Col Latin said.

Regular pharmacy hours are from 7 AM to 4 PM during the week. The base exchange, where the remote pharmacy is

located, on the other hand, is open weekends and during more week-day hours than the pharmacy. While patients can still continue to pick up refills at the pharmacy if they choose, by using the ScriptCenter, patients have more flexibility as to when they want to pick up their medica-

Picking up Prescriptions

The ScriptCenter can only be used to pick up refills. Beneficiaries who decide that they would like to pick up their prescriptions at the dispensing machine must indicate that preference when ordering a refill. The prescription will be available to be dispensed through the machine on the second business day after ordering. “When they call and say that they want to pick it up at the machine, the prescriptions are generated back behind the walls of our pharmacy,” said Col Latin.

The medication is then placed in the ScriptCenter. The machine is able to identify who is picking up the medication through biometric technology that allows the user to either put a finger on a scanner so the fingerprint is scanned, or through the user’s pin number. The machine provides help in both Spanish and English, and will dispense the medication. Col Latin said that patients have about a week



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According to Col Latin, picking up medications through the machine is as safe as picking them up at the pharmacy. Pharmacists have verified that the ScriptCenter dispenses only the correct medication to the correct individual. “It is as safe as when you go to the pharmacy to get your drugs,” she said.

Theft of the medications in the machine would also be extremely difficult because the machine is in an open area, she said. “There are security cameras all over the base exchange, so we have security keeping an eye on it. It is a very open, visible spot... It is right next to the food court, right next to the bathroom,” she said.

Advantage for Patients

The use of the ScriptCenter does not change the job of the pharmacists on base. They still make sure that the patient is receiving the appropriate prescription, and that there are no drug conflicts for patients. “They are filling the same number of prescriptions. The only difference is instead of having 80 people waiting for prescriptions, it now offers the customers a different location to pick up the medications. That is the essential advantage. The pharmacists still perform all of the work, fill the same number of prescriptions, and essentially, have the same job to do,” said Col Latin.

Because there is a large retiree population who may not be accustomed to using computers or the idea of biometric technology, the base is working to edu-

cate the population it serves on the dispensing machine. “We have brochures that are printed that are very self explanatory...we are working hard to educate them,” she said. “As a matter of fact, we are going to start recording some of the statistics such as how often it is being used. It is somewhat of comparable to the e-tickets system. When that came out, people were somewhat slow to learn the whole process. I estimate that it will take 6 months to 1 year to become robust. Once that happens, we should start seeing a significant decrease in the of people waiting outside the lobby of the pharmacy.”

Ramstein Air Base in Germany and Royal Air Force Lakenheath in England are also receiving a unit this summer, according to Col Latin. In addition, LA Air Force Base may also get another if it is determined that the new unit has benefited the servicemembers. “If it works out really well here, we will most likely put one of these machines down closer to our housing area, about 20 miles south at Fort MacArthur,” she said.

Once people start using the ScriptCenter and experience its convenience, Col Latin is convinced they will like it. “Once people realize that they don’t have to physically sit and wait for a prescription, I really believe that we will see fewer people outside the clinic waiting for their medication, and more using this Scriptcenter at the base exchange noted Col Latin. **USM**



Col Latin tries out the new automated prescription center at a ribbon cutting ceremony on June 13. The Script Center Express Prescription Refill and Pickup Center is the first of its kind in the Air Force and DoD. (Photo by Atiba S. Copeland)

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after they have ordered the refill to pick up their prescriptions from the machine.

Beneficiaries cannot use the ScriptCenter to pick up medications that are oversized or need to be refrigerated. In addition, narcotics must be picked up at the pharmacy.