Pharmacy kiosks gaining momentum

by Antoinette Alexander
October 12th, 2005

NEW YORK -- In an effort to reduce lines at the pharmacy counter and enable pharmacists to have more time to interact with patients, drug chains increasingly are turning their attention to pharmacy kiosks.

It is an industry trend that undoubtedly is gaining steam and has even raised a few eyebrows as the ATM-like machines could actually cut down traditional face-to-face consultations between the pharmacist and the patients when they pick up their prescriptions. Nonetheless, more and more pharmacies are dipping their toes in the kiosk waters.

The biggest player currently in this arena is Duane Reade. The Manhattan-based retailer currently has more than 60 kiosks, called DR Express, in office locations with 2,000 or more employees, medical and hospital facilities, senior care centers and at some Duane Reade stores. The goal: to double the number of kiosks every 12 months.

The interactive kiosks are unique from others in the marketplace in that they provide access to pharmacy staff 24/7 to answer questions and process prescriptions. Equipped with a flatbed scanner, Web camera, touch-screen monitor and voice communication, the kiosks enable patients to interact with a pharmacist to discuss drug interactions, transmit new prescriptions, order refills and transfer existing prescriptions. Prescriptions that are ordered through the kiosk can be picked up at any of Duane Reade's 250-plus stores.

The drug chain now is turning the kiosks into a revenue-generating initiative by licensing them to such noncompeting drug chains as Farmington, Conn.-based DrugMax. DrugMax plans to operate kiosks under its Familymeds and Arrow Pharmacy brands. Initially it will open five locations by year's end in the greater Connecticut market, with additional locations in other markets planned for next year. The kiosks will be installed on medical campuses that DrugMax does not currently serve, as well as in locations where the company has a pharmacy, but in a separate building.

In New York, Kmart recently installed in its three-floor Penn Station store an ATM-like kiosk developed by Distributed Delivery Networks. The kiosk, known as the Automated Product Machine, requires the patient to enter a personal identification number and electronic signature to deliver prescriptions with the swipe of a credit card.

Distributed Delivery Networks also is testing a kiosk at White Cross Drug Store in San Diego.

Meanwhile, Asteres is offering similar machines for retail pharmacy. Asteres recently announced that Walgreens and Safeway have joined Longs Drug Stores in receiving waivers from the California State Board of Pharmacy to install its ScriptCenter machines. Longs installed ScriptCenter in a Del Mar, Calif., unit in December. In Virginia, Ahold was granted tentative approval by the Virginia Board of Pharmacy to test a ScriptCenter dispensing machine in a Reston, Va., store.

Asteres also has developed a new software platform that allows ScriptCenter to manage additional store products that are subject to restrictions, such as some OTC medications and such high-shrink items as razor blades. In addition, the company is introducing a new ScriptCenter Container for loading 90-day fills into ScriptCenter.

"We have put our customer suggestions back to work for the customer," stated Al Waterhouse, Asteres president and chief executive officer. "Our company is committed to the careful integration of our market defining products into the retail pharmacy."