

## BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

# Defense order to add workers to Innovation

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*Employees will build 3 refill robots*

JOHNSON CITY – Innovation Associates is expected to hire up to 15 new employees, a combination of engineers and customer service staff, as it gears up to manufacture three more robotic pharmaceutical refill centers for the Department of Defense.

The order comes a month after the grand opening of Innovations Associates' installation of the first refill center in Colorado Springs, a joint services center designed to service military personnel worldwide.

"The refill processing center enables us to use staff more efficiently and removes the technical refilling process from the daily base operation so that pharmacists can concentrate on patient counseling and dispense prescriptions without interruptions," said Col. Ardis Meier, pharmacy consultant to the Air Force Surgeon General.

The prescription-dispensing robot is able to fill 7,000 orders daily, company representatives said. The product is an outgrowth of a similar system that the company has been selling to commercial pharmacies for more

than five years. The recently installed Colorado machine is filling up to 3,000 prescriptions daily during a nine-hour day.

The new robotic refill centers that will operate the Innovation Associates machinery will be located at Air Force bases in Phoenix, Las Vegas and San Antonio.

"The most valuable feature of the robot and the software used in the prescription-filling process is that it virtually eliminates drug-to-drug errors, which are the most common types of pharmacy dispensing errors," said Lieutenant Colonel David Johnson, 10th Medical Group Pharmacy Flight commander. Drug-to-drug errors refer to filling a prescription with something other than the medication prescribed.

Innovation Associates has been one of the pioneers in pharmacy automation. Innovation Associates PharmASSIST, an automated pill dispenser, is used at more than 75 Air Force bases, 650 CVS pharmacies across the country and countless other independent and chain pharmacies.

Each PharmASSIST unit is capable of holding 48 to 50 pill hoppers. Pharmacies usually load the most popular pills into the automated machines. When a prescription order arrives, the pharmacist will type the order into a computer and the machine will count out the exact number of pills. The machine then drops them into a canister.

In the newest wave of hiring, Innovation Associates has openings for mechanical engineers, electrical engineers, computer engineers, network specialists, among other specialties. The company now has about 100 employees.

The privately-held firm does not disclose revenues or net income.

BY JEFF PLATSKY  
e-mail: [jplatsky@pressconnects.com](mailto:jplatsky@pressconnects.com)