

St. Joe's pharmacy system cuts medication errors in half: Hospital credits automated workflow system, prescription dispensing

BY TRACEY BIRKENHAUER
tbirkenhauer@mbizreview.com

St. Joseph Mercy Health System has implemented a solution in its outpatient pharmacies that in six months has cut its error rate in half.

Good news, especially since medication errors cause at least one death every day and injure about 1.3 million people annually in the United States, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research.

These numbers include medication mishaps anywhere in the distribution system, including faulty prescribing, packaging, dispensing, administering and monitoring.



1Karen Lawson fills a prescription with an automated counting cabinet. Photo by HEATHER ROUSSEAU

Glenn Monroy notes that St. Joseph's error rate was extremely low before it implemented the new technology, PharmASSIST Symphony by Innovation Associates. He's the service delivery leader of the ambulatory pharmacy department.

PharmASSIST is an automated prescription dispensing and workflow management system. It's integrated with St. Joseph's pharmacy management system, Pharmacy Rx by NDC Health.

Four outpatient pharmacies two at the main campus and one each in Saline and Brighton have various software configurations of the PharmASSIST solution.

PharmASSIST products, deployed in more than 1,100 facilities, have been on the market since 1997. Customers include CVS Pharmacy, the Cleveland Clinic and the U.S. Air Force.

"We knew that we needed this technology in order to maintain the highest level of accuracy available as well as its ability to improve our workflow in the pharmacy," said Laura Passiak, project manager of pharmacy automation. "In addition, it allowed us to better manage our staffing and increase the ratio of technicians to pharmacists."

The almost \$300,000 system triple-checks against errors.

Monroy said the health system would recoup its investment in less than five years. The system has created many efficiencies that have reduced staffing costs.

Also, pharmacists who used to be behind the counter counting pills now have more time to meet and counsel customers. The new pharmacy solution required reconfiguring and, in one case, reconstructing outpatient pharmacies to best accommodate process improvements and technology.

Instead of shuffling a piece of paper, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians scan paper prescriptions into the computer-based system, which links the script image with the patient's information.

The system verifies that the correct medication and strength are being dispensed compared to the information entered from the prescription. The hard-wired dispensing cabinet, home to 50 of the pharmacy's most popular prescriptions, starts counting pills as soon as the order crosses the interface.

The new process incorporates prescription and bar code scanning, digital imagery and order details for quality control.

The computer interface displays a picture of the tablet or package size along with the prescription during the verification stage. The computer software is complemented by physical elements such as color-coded bins and an electronic signature keypad for customers.

"The error opportunity is greatly reduced," Passiak said. "That's extra piece of mind with all these safeguards"

INSIDE Business

- » American Biz Daily
- » Autos
- » Auto Weblog
- » Business Review
- » BusinessWire
- » Market Updates
- » NewsFlash
- » Newspapers
- » PR Newswire

BUSINESS RESOURCES

Banking Services

- » [United Bank & Trust](#)

Commercial HVAC

- » [Fuller Heating Computer Sales & Service](#)

Corporate Meetings & Events

- » [Walter P. Chrysler Museum](#)

Interest Rates

- » [Rock Financial](#)
- » [Garrow-Loftis](#)

An Advertising Section

Site Tools

- E-mail This
- Print This
- Search Site
- Newsletters

Speak Up!

- Talk about business
- Talk about autos
- Talk W. Mich. Biz

Get Your Local Edition

» [Contests & Games. Click here!](#)



FROM OUR ADVERTISERS

• [Advertise With Us](#)

OUR AFFILIATES



St. Joseph's outpatient pharmacies fill 120300 prescriptions a day. A special team spent two years assessing different solutions.

Monroy said they chose PharmASSIST because it provided good value compared to more high-tech systems that can exceed \$1 million.

Also, its small footprint best fit the health system's pharmacies, with their limited space.

Competing products, like those used at some University of Michigan Health System outpatient pharmacies, employ robotic dispensing systems that can fill, label and collate up to 150 prescriptions per hour.

The bar code scanning feature alone will prevent a significant number of errors, said Stuart Levine, an informatics specialist at the Institute for Safe Medication Practices, a nonprofit health care agency with a mission of reducing prescription errors.

"This ensures what you pick off the shelf is what you give the patient," he said. "It really is an effective tool. They've redone their workflow to identify risk."

Levine's primary role at ISMP is to promote medication safety by using technology.

He said there aren't any accurate numbers to demonstrate how many pharmacies use automated technology systems.

Many system failures can be prevented by using IT-based solutions, a fact embraced by St. Joseph Mercy Health System.

For almost five years inpatient clinicians have submitted prescriptions electronically. The outpatient side hasn't transitioned to computerized order entry yet, but the PharmASSIST solution can be upgraded to accommodate that technology once it's implemented.

Tracey Birkenhauer can be reached at (734) 302-1721 or tbirkenhauer@mbizreview.com.



Print This



E-mail This

[The Best Local Classifieds: Jobs](#) | [Autos](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Place An Ad](#)

Special Home Delivery Offers!



[Ann Arbor News](#) | [Bay City Times](#) | [Flint Journal](#)
[Grand Rapids Press](#) | [Jackson Citizen Patriot](#) | [Kalamazoo Gazette](#)
[Muskegon Chronicle](#) | [Saginaw News](#)

[About Us](#) | [Help/Feedback](#) | [Advertise With Us](#)

Use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [User Agreement](#). Please read our [Privacy Policy](#).
©2005 [MLive.com](#). All Rights Reserved.

