

# Tech plays huge role in Rx workflow

• **Kroger** is introducing a wellness-related app that provides numeric product ratings and a “gamified” dashboard to encourage customers to make better-for-you shopping decisions. The app, called **OptUp**, offers nutrition scoring based on a nutrient profiling system that has been enhanced by Kroger’s registered dietitians.

The app also provides healthier recommendations as alternatives to what users tend to purchase, allowing them to evaluate what they buy and track their scores over time.

[www.kroger.com](http://www.kroger.com)

• **RangeMe**, the award-winning online platform that streamlines new product discovery between product suppliers and retailers, has eclipsed more than 125,000 suppliers on its platform. This number represents massive growth for the company over the past two years. In 2015, RangeMe had 1,500 product suppliers on its platform. 2016 saw that number rise 30-fold to 45,000. Last year, the number nearly tripled, and it currently stands at over 125,000 consumer packaged goods companies actively marketing their brands and products on the platform.

[www.rangeme.com](http://www.rangeme.com)

• **Amazon’s Amazon Go** cashier-free grocery store of the future is coming to San Francisco and Chicago. The store uses a collection of cameras and sensors to constantly track customers and inventory. Shoppers need to open the Amazon Go app to enter, and any products they take from the store are automatically charged to their account when they leave. [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

• **Hallmark** is partnering with retailers to drive profitability by bringing the greeting card aisle to the online marketplace. This focus on delivering new and innovative solutions comes at a time when sectors such as the grocery industry are experiencing growth in online sales. Hallmark’s research discovered online grocery shoppers are more likely to be card buyers, which emphasized the need to create a dedicated e-commerce team focused on developing strategies, solutions and tools for its retail partners to seamlessly extend their greetings aisles to their online markets.

[www.hallmark.com](http://www.hallmark.com)

NEW YORK — Automation technology continues to make its mark on pharmacy operations. Work-flow solutions at most retail pharmacies across the U.S. now feature devices ranging from robotic dispensers to automated counting machines, all tied together with robust integrated software systems. These new solutions are helping speed up processes and are allowing pharmacists to concentrate more on patients.

Michael Coughlin, president, chief executive officer and chief financial officer of ScriptPro, says right now the pace of change is rapid. “Pharmacies in all practice settings need to continually examine their business models and adapt. With DIR [direct and indirect remuneration] fees, payers have created new and confusing reimbursement mechanisms that are anything but transparent. Increasing integration of pharmacy benefit managers and insurance companies closes some doors and potentially opens other doors. As always, transitions present both problems and opportunities.”

He adds that in a more enlightened context the profession of pharmacy has moved a long way from existing as just a link in the supply chain to becoming a vital element in the health and well-being of society. “New and exciting technologies have evolved to meet the challenges. Pharmacy innovators who move quickly to capitalize on the power of these technologies will be the winners. It is important to differentiate between the myriad of players in this space who provide pieces of software and marketing pitches versus those who deliver end-to-end solutions along with enlightened strategic planning. This is where ScriptPro stands



Innovation’s PharmASSIST RDS robotic dispensing unit.

out from a large and confusing crowd,” Coughlin concludes.

“Pharmacy leaders continue to evolve their pharmacy models into two key areas: fulfillment and delivery of services. Innovation’s main focus is on how to help them centralize prescription fulfillment so they can better execute on delivering value-added patient services and improving their patients’ experience,” says Doyle Jensen, executive vice president of global business development at Innovation.

He points out that retail chains understand the overwhelming benefits of centralizing versus implementing automation in individual pharmacies. “Central-fill sites pull large volumes of prescriptions out of their pharmacies, helping to free up their pharmacists and staff to provide what their patients want today ... a wide range of patient-facing services. And from a financial investment standpoint, centralization reduces overall costs, including labor costs/cost to fill, on-hand inventory costs and technology maintenance costs. It also has a well-defined return on investment, which we can prove out

to them by analyzing their own dispensing data through our unique Pharmacy Intelligence service.”

Jensen says the key to the overall effectiveness and productivity of central-fill sites depends on how well they are managed. He explains that retail chains with high-volume sites need a platform to serve as the adaptive brain that can automatically adjust to the numerous changes in work-flow caused by changes in demand.

“Although robotic dispensing, conveying, and automated

*‘Right now the pace of change is very rapid.’*

packaging and logistics systems are core components of these sites, an intelligent operations platform enables these sites to perform dynamic prioritization and workload balancing, and gain in-depth transparency to avoid bottlenecks and develop best practices.

Our PharmASSIST Symphony for High Volume serves as that adaptive brain and constantly adjusts throughout the day to optimize system performance and prescription throughput,” he explains.

The company recently announced that MaxorPlus has implemented the firm’s PharmASSIST high-volume pharmacy automation for its MXP mail order facility in Amarillo, Texas.

“As we planned for this mail order technology project, our main goals were to improve our prescription fulfillment quality for patients, achieve quicker turnaround times on our patient orders and increase operational efficiency,” said Steve Smith, executive vice president at MaxorPlus. “Innovation’s high-volume technologies were at the head of the pack in various areas, including process and logistics efficiency, quality protocols, scalability and footprint.”

Jon Bell, market analyst at SharpRx QS/1 Data System, is seeing a focus on clinical services for the independent pharmacy. “Pharmacies that are focusing on improving the overall health care for their patients with services like immunizations, comprehensive medication reviews, etc., are a big area for pharmacies to focus on. In addition to that, DIR fees are obviously a pain point for pharmacies that are dealing with ‘claw-back’ of money after it has been adjudicated and reconciled.”

He points out that QS/1 provides pharmacy software that allows the pharmacy to focus on taking care of the medication needs for their patients as well as clinical services. “We are also building in a DIR fee estimator so the pharmacy can estimate prior to filling/processing the prescription how much the DIR

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## AI offers new care options for MinuteClinic

BOSTON — Buoy Health, a startup health technology company that develops digital tools, has entered into an agreement with CVS Health’s MinuteClinic subsidiary to provide patients with convenient, accessible and affordable care at any of the more than 1,100 MinuteClinic locations nationwide.

The relationship, which will be available to patients through [www.buoyhealth.com](http://www.buoyhealth.com) later this year, will leverage Buoy’s advanced artificial intelligence (AI) not only to help patients gain a more accurate assessment of what is wrong, but to help them get better faster by providing them with easy access to care at a nearby MinuteClinic, when appropriate.

“We started Buoy to stop the spiral that consumers currently face when they attempt to look

up and analyze their symptoms online,” said Dr. Andrew Le, chief executive officer of Buoy Health. “But when someone is sick, they need more than just an accurate assessment of what is wrong; they need tangible options for what to do next. By aligning with an industry leader like CVS Health, we will now not only have the ability through AI-powered triage to guide people to the right care, we will also be able to connect them with the care they need in the moment they need it the most.”

To access the service, consumers will go to the website and begin engaging with its intuitive AI, in an exchange designed to mirror a conversation with a favorite doctor. Patients are then prompted through a series of questions to enter their symptoms in detail. Sample questions

include, “How long have you been experiencing your cough?” or “Any fever today or during the last week or two?”

Buoy’s AI will then analyze the consumer’s inputs in real-time and measure them against proprietary and granular data, to intelligently decide the most important question to ask next. In just two to three minutes, Buoy will gain a detailed and accurate understanding of the consumer’s case and point the consumer to the best next step for care. This can include directing a consumer to the right clinically validated over-the-counter treatment or recommending that they go see their primary care physician or that they access a doctor via telemedicine. If additional care is needed and a retail clinic would be the appropriate place to receive that care, Buoy

will help the patient connect to MinuteClinic, where they will be able to hold their place in line at a location nearby. Consumers may also be directed to urgent care or to an emergency room.

“CVS Health is committed to helping people on their path to better care. We do so by providing high-quality health care services that are convenient, affordable and accessible for patients,” said Dr. Troy Brennan, executive vice president and chief medical officer of CVS Health. “Entering into a relationship with a health-tech innovator like Buoy to connect their experience to our nationwide network of MinuteClinic providers gives us the opportunity to provide affordable care at times and locations that work best for the patients who utilize this innovative technology.”