

Smooth scripts

Automated workflow helps Hy-Vee handle high volume.

By Joseph Tarnowski

While any supermarket pharmacy welcomes new business, 400 to 500 prescriptions per day can be a lot to handle. No matter how well staffed the pharmacy is, there's still the challenge of execution. With so many prescriptions flying around, even the most skilled pharmacy staff can make the occasional mistake or, at the least, face delays in filling them all.

This is exactly the bittersweet situation that pharmacy manager Bruce Jones faced at a Hy-Vee supermarket located in the retailer's headquarters city of West Des Moines, Iowa.

"We originally wanted to get the system because we do around 400 to 500 prescriptions per day, and we needed to control our workflow so everything went smoothly and we didn't lose any prescriptions in the mix," he says. "With the workflow system we can look up a person's name, and it will tell us if a prescription is still on the shelf or if it's being processed, and where along the line it is. It will also help in preventing mistakes such as grabbing the wrong medicine."

The store is using the SP Central Workflow System and robotic prescription-dispensing system from Mission, Kan.-based pharmacy automation provider ScriptPro to automate as much as the workflow as possible, so the staff can spend more time on value-added activities.

The workflow system, along with the robotic dis-

dispensing technology, helps Jones coordinate the entire pharmacy workflow. SP Central identifies and batches all prescriptions for every patient to ensure proper medication delivery, and offers a variety of reports that give pharmacists visibility into the operation of their pharmacy. The system allows a pharmacist to find out who has filled and verified each prescription, how many prescriptions are being filled each hour, and the location of every prescription in the pharmacy.

It also allows managers to maximize pharmacy efficiency and productivity by setting different pharmacy workflows for different times of the day, creating optimal workflows for peak and non-peak pharmacy hours.

Before installing the system, the pharmacy staff executed all tasks by hand. “We have a lot of volume, and we had problems keeping up with it before the SP Central system, because we had to hand-count everything,” recounts Jones. “Plus we didn’t have the robot then, and with so many prescriptions being filled, there was a lot of potential for mistakes. This system really prevents that, plus it keeps everything going efficiently and smoothly. Everybody knows where everything is and

where it’s supposed to be.”

Hy-Vee installed the robotic prescription dispenser to help handle the large volume that the pharmacy sees from its many older shoppers. “We use the robot to count the top 200 drugs,” says Jones. “If a prescription includes one of those drugs, it automatically counts it for us; then it comes off the conveyor belt with a label.” (For more on ScriptPro’s robotic unit, see the Nov. 1, 2005 issue of PG.)

The workflow system is used for all other drugs. It automates parts of the prescription-filling process, and provides checks and balances to ensure the right drugs are selected.

Here’s how the process

works with the SP Central system:

First, the customer’s prescription information is entered into the pharmacy’s Condor system, which interfaces with SP Central, but isn’t part of the SP technology. The system prints out a label and sends it to SP Central. If the prescription includes one of the top 200 drugs, it’s sent to the robotic dispenser to be filled automatically. Otherwise it’s sent to the SP Central workstation for a technician to fill.

The pharmacy technician who works at the SP Central workstation prints out the label and gets the medicine that needs

SP Central pharmacy dispensing management system

THE SP CENTRAL software platform links ScriptPro’s robotic systems together and displays script status, resource allocation, and exception handling throughout the pharmacy.

According to the manufacturer, SP Central provides:

- A flexible, universal platform configured to the retailer’s practice setting.
- A control system to maximize pharmacy efficiency and productivity.
- Managerial tools to monitor and control the entire dispensing process.
- Standardized labeling for all prescriptions.
- On-screen images for verification.
- Bar code controls for all dispensing functions.
- Performance and tracking reports for workflow and productivity optimization.
- Automated and paperless patient prescription collation.



to be filled. This is where the system’s checks and balances come into play. When the stock bottle of pills is scanned, it will only allow the technician to proceed if the prescription matches the inventory. If it’s the correct match, then the technician can start counting the pills and print a label from the system to stick on the pill bottle. Then an image of the actual prescription is scanned into the system.

“That really helps if there’s a ques-

batch label will indicate whom those drugs are for, and for what purpose,” says Jones. “If there are different family members, it can batch them all together and throw them in the same bag. It keeps their prescriptions together even if they’re called in at different times. This way they don’t forget to pick one of them up.”

When the process is completed, the prescription is sent to the pharmacist, who scans each prescription bottle, scans

“We’ve had problems keeping up with the volume, because we had to hand-count everything.”

—Bruce Jones, Hy-Vee

tion about the actual written prescription,” says Jones. “We can bring up an image on the screen and show the customer. You don’t have to dig through all the prescriptions in the file cabinet.”

They also affix a batch label to a prescription, if needed. This handy feature of the system groups multiple prescriptions together by patient or family. “The

the bar code, and checks to see that it’s the correct medicine. The pharmacist’s screen will have a picture of what the pills are supposed to look like, and the pharmacist verifies that it’s the same thing. Then the medication goes into the bag and is sent to the counter to be picked up.

So far, the system has been extremely successful, not only allowing the store to meet its prescription demands, but also freeing the pharmacist on duty to consult with customers, says Jones.

“The pharmacists are very happy with it. They don’t have to do all the counting and inputting; they can help the customer one-on-one. We even have time every once in a while to go out into the HBC aisle and help shoppers if they need a cold remedy or have an upset stomach, which has helped overall sales.” ■

HEB donates \$1 million for pharmacy school

Regional independent supermarket chain HEB this month donated \$1 million to the University of the Incarnate Word for its new school of pharmacy, which is slated to open in fall 2007.

The presentation was made by Winell Herron, HEB’s group v.p. of public affairs and diversity, during a ground-breaking ceremony at the San Antonio-based school’s building site. With the gift, HEB, also based in San Antonio, aims to help curtail the shortage of pharmacists in Texas. Due to growing demand, Texas must annually recruit pharmacists from other states.

The 56,000-square-foot school of pharmacy, which will be known as the Feik School of Pharmacy, will be the first in the nation to offer Spanish-language certification. The school will also contain a museum, computer laboratories, classrooms, and a refreshment center. Additionally, it will house a 100-seat teleconference center that will be used for meetings and community events.

“HEB is proud of its long-standing partnership with the University of the Incarnate Word,” says Herron. “On behalf of our customers and partners, we are excited to provide a \$1 million gift to the school of pharmacy. The school will fulfill an important need in communities across south Texas for highly trained pharmacists.”