



Enhancing Pharmacy Practice with Automated Dispensing Technology

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CVS/pharmacy Partners with Innovation Associates to Bring High Quality Dispensing to Their Patients

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As an industry leader CVS/pharmacy has always been proactive in evaluating and implementing various types of pharmacy automation technology. During the mid-90s, the chain developed a comprehensive technology assessment strategy and began evaluating various pharmacy service concepts, one of which was the Enhanced Workflow Pharmacy Automation (EWPA) Program. The charter of the EWPA Program was to migrate pharmacy workflow processing into a retail environment and to evaluate how various technologies such as workflow systems and automated prescription dispensing could increase efficiencies in CVS pharmacies.

PharmASSIST[®]
case study



CVS/pharmacy is the leading drugstore chain in the United States with more than 4,100 stores in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, and Midwest regions of the country, covering 27 states and the District of Columbia. Founded in 1963, CVS/pharmacy dispenses more prescriptions than any other pharmacy in America, with nearly 10% of the nation's prescriptions being filled at CVS stores.



“The EWPA Program gravitated into our EPIC (Excellence in Pharmacy Innovation and Care) workflow system that is in place today,” says Rich Lynch, CVS’s Director, Retail Pharmacy Practice Design in their Healthcare Business Solutions group. “When EWPA was completed and the decision was made to go with EPIC, we also made some decisions about counting automation. Although we had been using some automated dispensing in our pharmacies, we wanted to re-evaluate the market and see whether we could improve our current situation.”

CVS had specific goals in mind as they surveyed the field. They wanted to: enhance the quality of their prescription dispensing process; to find a solution that was both highly scalable for different volume levels and could easily fit into their multiple configurations; and to reduce the amount of time they spent on maintaining the dispensing equipment.

CVS began working with Innovation Associates in 1998 and evaluated Innovation's PharmASSIST automated dispensing system first in their Woonsocket-based lab and then live in stores in Woonsocket, RI and Albany, NY. The PharmASSIST Enterprise System is comprised of 1-8 cabinets housing 50 dispensers each and pharmacy workflow functionality. CVS's Healthcare Business Solutions group evaluated a 4-cabinet, 200 dispenser configuration, and learned a great deal about the PharmASSIST technology.



"We had made a decision to use our own workflow software, EPIC, but we liked the PharmASSIST product because it offered so many of the features we were looking for in an automated dispensing product," says Lynch. "We discussed this with Innovation and we agreed to work closely with them to develop a pure counting technology product and to define its system functionality." Thus the PharmASSIST SmartCabinet began to take shape.

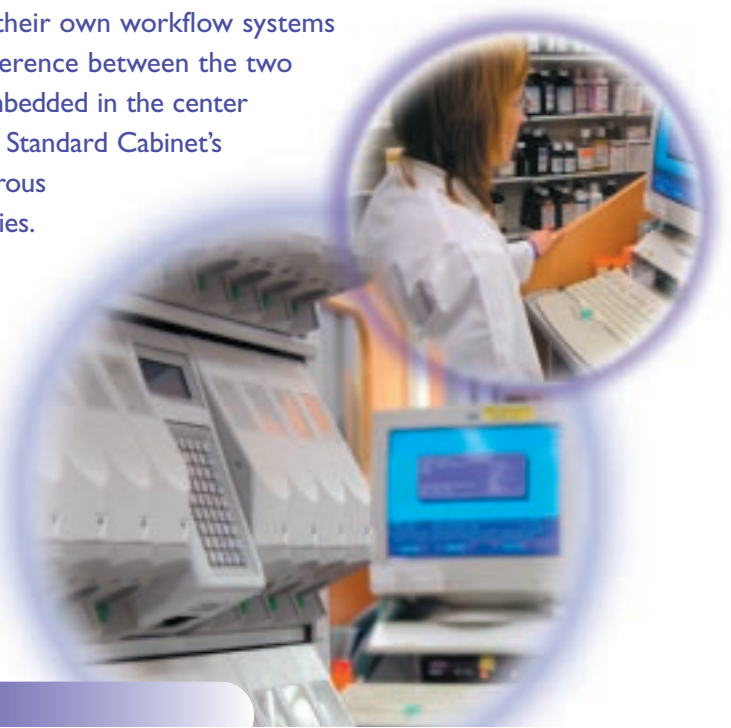


The PharmASSIST SmartCabinet is Born

As Innovation's CEO Mary Reno recalls, "We had a great working relationship with the CVS team and we felt strongly that our product and our overall approach was right on. We simply needed to fine tune the base functionality and to develop a stand-alone counting solution that could seamlessly integrate with EPIC and other workflow systems."

Innovation's product development team gathered valuable input from CVS and promptly created the PharmASSIST SmartCabinet to provide the precise counting technology that CVS was seeking. "We were, and have continued to be, extremely satisfied with Innovation's R&D efforts (especially their ability to anticipate and to provide innovative ideas on how to better utilize the product or on product enhancements." says Lynch.

The PharmASSIST SmartCabinet embodies much of the PharmASSIST Enterprise System's quality features; however, it enables pharmacies to use their own workflow systems to manage their non-filling functions. The other key difference between the two systems is that the Smart-Cabinet has the SmartCell embedded in the center of the cabinet, and it contains 48 dispensers instead of a Standard Cabinet's 50 dispensers. Both systems are scalable and offer numerous multi-cabinet configurations and physical layout possibilities.





As the SmartCabinet's command center, the SmartCell consists of a keypad, LCD display, and hands-free scanner and enables CVS staff to perform all automated filling, dispenser replenishment, and inventory-related tasks. Using the SmartCell, they can use the Quick Rx feature to enter and dispense orders on the fly. They simply enter orders using the SmartCell's keypad and follow the instructions displayed on the SmartCell's display to dispense medications.

“PharmASSIST's simultaneous counting and software-controlled drug changeovers really speed up the overall process. You experience faster filling and less downtime with your equipment, which results in a real time savings.”



Achieving High Marks in the Pilot

After completing extensive quality control, systems integration, and usability testing, CVS and Innovation forged ahead with two PharmASSIST SmartCabinet system evaluation sites, each dispensing approximately 2000 prescriptions weekly. The pilots were held for four months and upon achieving solid results, CVS rolled out the system to a third store that was filling 3200 prescriptions weekly.

During the pilot, CVS developed an Operational Comparison Summary to compare the PharmASSIST SmartCabinet to another automated dispensing technology. CVS categorized their evaluation criteria into three main groups:

General

- Counting speed
- Enhanced quality assurance
- Ease of installation
- Physical footprint efficiencies
- Staff acceptance
- Inventory control

Maintenance

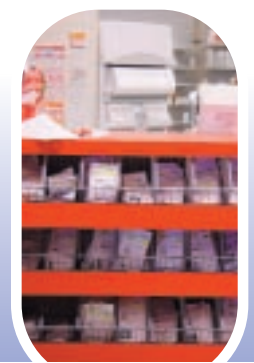
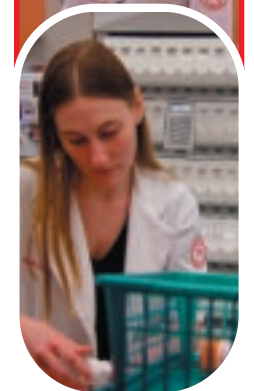
- Significant maintenance reduction (from a hardware standpoint)
- Loading ease – initial replenishment of equipment
- Cleaning ease
- Cleaning frequency
- Change out ease (faster and easier drug changeovers)

Support

- Offer technical/logistical support
- Offer Help desk with dedicated 800 number
- Offer hardware support

Based on CVS's detailed evaluation criteria, the PharmASSIST SmartCabinet performed well in all categories and achieved high marks across the board. The CVS pharmacies experienced increased efficiency and enhanced quality in their dispensing process, and found that the SmartCabinet required much less maintenance than other systems.

But there were some obstacles along the way. Some CVS pharmacy staff were somewhat resistant to change. “The initial gut reaction was that we're already using an automation product; why are we changing midstream?” comments Lynch. “We also saw that people were initially a little intimidated by PharmASSIST's capabilities, protocols, and high tech appearance. In general, I think people are innately fearful of technology.”





The integration of PharmASSIST and EPIC was also a bit more tedious than expected. As Phil Keough, CVS's Director, Pharmacy Operations states, "I think we took some things for granted when we took this on. We experienced some problems early on with the flow of orders. Good change management was the key here and although it took us much longer than we thought it would, we eventually worked out the kinks and had things running smoothly."

After working through these hurdles, the chain was pleased with the results of the SmartCabinet pilot and moved ahead with 16 additional installations in 1999, and has since rolled out over 300 systems overall.



Realizing Their Goals

As the rollout of PharmASSIST SmartCabinet systems has progressed, CVS has realized many benefits and has made great strides in delivering high quality patient care, handling ever-increasing prescription volumes, and improving staff utilization and pharmacy workflow.

"In our higher volume stores using SmartCabinet, our techs are now doing all the filling and our pharmacists are able to perform clinical activities around drug utilization reviews, prescription verification, and patient counseling," says Lynch. "Through the combination of our workflow, automation technology, and tech training program, we have achieved a higher level of patient interaction."

"We especially like the SmartCabinet's intelligence and the messaging it displays to our users. The system's "pick to light" and message display take a lot of confusion out of the automated filling process in our stores. For example, when you scan a label, you know exactly that that's your prescription, that's what you're counting, and that's the dispenser it's in. You're not leaving decision making up to the user."

Commenting on the dispenser features and the efficiency they bring to the table, Lynch states, "PharmASSIST's simultaneous counting and software-controlled drug change-overs really speed up the overall process. You experience faster filling and less downtime with your equipment, which results in a real time savings."

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To monitor store utilization and to gain insight into their SmartCabinet configuration/volume decisions, CVS has leveraged PharmASSIST's ability to provide valuable data. Explains Lynch, "PharmASSIST enables us to better monitor utilizations so we can continue to maximize the counting automation in our stores based on drug utilization. With PharmASSIST, we can monitor whether stores are utilizing the automation properly. It provides us with the ability to maintain some level of control and to ensure that stores are maximizing the tools we're providing."

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From a pharmacy operations perspective, Keough concurs with Lynch assessment. "We've seen great successes with the PharmASSIST technology. It's easy to learn, offers top-notch quality controls, makes drug changeovers much easier, and fits very well with EPIC and our objective of quality first," Keough adds, "As for maintenance, it's much less labor intensive to maintain and is a very resilient system." As with all pharmacies, physical space is always an issue and CVS feels that SmartCabinet's compact and modular design is a key factor in its success. "One of the big wins for us was SmartCabinet's footprint," says Lynch. "When you look at the fact of our acquisition history, we operate about 30 different configurations. The adaptability of the SmartCabinet to fit into these configurations is significant." He continues. "On top of that, it fits easily into our newer Cap Flex configuration, which we're putting into all new stores. Cap Flex is our full modular pharmacy configuration and PharmASSIST works wonderfully with it. It's essentially a plug-n-play fit; it's simply a matter of a fixture reset to install PharmASSIST cabinets."



To ensure that CVS pharmacy staff knows how to use the system and has prompt resolution to usability and technical issues that arise, Innovation has partnered with CVS to develop its training program and to educate the CVS Help Desk to handle PharmASSIST-related calls.

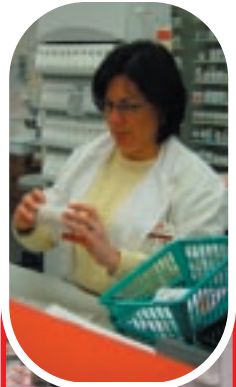


Partnering on Training and Customer Support

"As a customer-focused company, we provide in-depth training, proficient customer support, and top-notch documentation to all our customers," says Mary Reno. "As our first major client, CVS was influential in helping us develop a high-quality training program, installation team, and customer support function. Their need to be self sufficient in the training and support areas pushed us to perform a comprehensive knowledge transfer and to further develop our value added services."

Catherine Woolley, Innovation's Director of Training adds, "We worked closely with CVS to develop the initial training curriculum and documentation, and their Train-the-Trainer program. They provided valuable input on user aptitude and learning methodologies, and we customized the training to make it as effective as possible."

"Innovation provided in-depth training and documentation, and our staff helped to prove out much of their materials," states Lynch. "In the area of customer support we're very satisfied. We maintain performance metrics at various levels and the Help Desk metric, which has consistently been in excess of 95% satisfaction, indicates that Innovation is doing a solid job in terms of supporting our store staff. Pharmacists are the best indicator of our success or failure on this project, and the lack of complaints from them is indicative of the success of the PharmASSIST product."



The Relationship Continues to Thrive

CVS continues to implement their automation strategy with PharmASSIST SmartCabinet systems as a key component. With over 300 systems currently in place, CVS has gathered a great deal of revealing data about their mid- and high-volume pharmacies and has adjusted their SmartCabinet system configurations accordingly. As they move forward in 2002, the Healthcare Business Solutions group will continue to evaluate a central fill distribution model, which would further alleviate the ever-increasing volumes of prescriptions.

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“Our relationship with CVS has never been stronger,” says Reno. “We meet with them on a regular basis to discuss the rollout schedule, customer service and training issues, and general process enhancement ideas. We look forward to continuing our fruitful relationship with CVS and to helping them achieve their objectives in providing high quality healthcare solutions.”

Discover our vision of PharmASSIST automated dispensing solutions.

Call us at 607.798.9376, email us at sales@innovat.com, or go to www.innovat.com.

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