

Need for pharmacy dispensing systems rises

NEW YORK — Economic pressures have only heightened the need for pharmacy technology, according to suppliers of robotic dispensing units.

“Systems that can deal with script volume efficiently and still maintain accuracy and customer service are what pharmacy needs,” asserts ScriptPro LLC president and chief executive officer Mike Coughlin. “It has always needed them, but it needs them now more than ever.”

The ability of robotic devices to cost-effectively fill a large percentage of prescriptions makes them vital for a busy pharmacy, Coughlin says. But only 10% to 15% of pharmacies filling at least 150 scripts daily use robotic units, he notes, so there is still a widespread need for the devices.

In Canada, where ScriptPro robotic units are being rolled out by Shoppers Drug Mart, Coughlin says one of the chain’s executives told him: “We knew they were going to be important, but we can’t believe how important they’ve been. The pharmacy staffs are wondering how they survived without them.”

To help make robotics economical, Kirby Lester LLC has launched the KL60, which vice president of business development Christopher Thomsen says is the smallest and least expensive such unit available. With 60 cassettes, it’s more affordable than larger machines and helps pharmacies curtail inventory costs, he emphasizes.

The KL60 is versatile enough to benefit pharmacies filling anywhere from 150 to 700 prescriptions a day, Thomsen says. And loading just 60 cells versus 100 or 200 can reduce inventory by up to \$50,000, he adds.

Also, at 2½ feet by 4 feet, the

device can just be rolled into an end-cap without the need to shut down operations for a remodeling. It can be installed within a day, says Thomsen, adding that an entire pharmacy crew can be trained to use it



within a day and a half.

One West Coast pharmacist characterized the KL60 as “the first plug-and-play robot,” notes Thomsen.

For its part, QS/1 offers the RxMedic ADS with 256 cells in a 13-square-foot footprint. In addition to handling such repetitive tasks as labeling and counting,

it has digital technology to improve accuracy and reduce medication errors. The device takes a digital image of the contents of each vial right before it’s capped. Besides being used for checkout verification, the image can be

the level of service patients expect,” says director of business development Rob Brady. “The RxMedic offers something smaller, faster and more accurate than the other products on the market today.”

Technology is also recasting pharmacy work flow, notes ScriptPro’s Coughlin. While very large chains have their own work flow systems, a lot of mid-tier chains lack an easy-to-use system. ScriptPro offers a system that equals the capabilities of the largest chains’ systems, he says.

“Unlike other industries, not only the large players can have a very powerful system,” Coughlin remarks. “In this world, Joe’s Pharmacy can have a system that is more powerful than that of any of the biggest chains.”

Thomsen of Kirby Lester says he is seeing many more new pharmacy management systems with a work flow component. “Work flow is a big piece of this technology trend,” he says. “Being able to provide a standardized process and having a tool that allows bar code scans and checks of drug images before dispensing can only enhance safety and efficiency.”

retrieved for up to six months if a question arises about a script.

Moreover, the RxMedic is integrated with the QS/1 NRx pharmacy management system to receive orders from it.

“Automating repetitive tasks is the only way pharmacies will be able to keep up with increasing demand and still provide