

Drug Topics

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Pharmacy technology 2010

By Lynn Shapiro

The workhorse technologies that are driving return on investment and freeing pharmacists to perform medication therapy management — including robotics, point-of-sale systems, and pharmacy management systems in retail outlets, and secure narcotics-tracking and bar-code systems in hospitals — have taken firm root in a growing number of pharmacies today.

This year's offerings are ever more sophisticated. They include such diverse products as an advanced voice recognition system for prescription refills, which can encourage medication compliance; a telepharmacy system for real-time pharmacist oversight; an automatic refill system allowing patients to refill prescriptions from their cell phones; and a small compact robotic dispenser for automated dispensing.

In the hospital setting, a new software offering aids nursing in medication management, and a computerized physician order entry pharmacy system helps to improve pharmacy operations and increase safety in medication management.

KL60: The smallest robot

Kirby Lester has launched what it dubbed "the smallest robot," the KL60, said Christopher Thomsen, the company's vice president of business development. "When we asked our customers about the marketplace's unmet needs, they told us time and again to build a compact robot."

According to Thomsen, the KL60 boasts several advantages over competing robotic dispensers in a market. First and most noticeable is its compact size, Thomsen said. The KL60 robot is 2.5 feet by 4 feet, the size of a kitchen refrigerator. Many competing systems are 2.5 feet by 8 feet or more. "Some robots are really big. You can't fit them into many retail pharmacies, or if you did, you need a major renovation. The KL60 fits in a tiny space; just remove one 4-foot section of shelving and it rolls in," he said.

"Next is the number of medications automated. The KL60 automates 60 of the pharmacy's top movers. Not 100, or 200, or 250. It is truly the 80/20 rule, where you should automate only what makes sense. Automate your fast movers, and use a smaller, less expensive technology to dispense everything else."

Price is also a consideration. "The more compact the device, the less expensive," Thomsen said. "The KL60 is one-half to one-third the cost of other robotic dispensers."