



spotlight on health

Technology: A Prescription For Today's Pharmacy Ills

(NAPSA)—A convergence of trends may be making it more difficult and potentially less safe for consumers to fill their prescriptions—but you can beat the odds. According to a report from the Department of Health and Human Services, the nation is facing a pharmacist shortage, as nearly 7,000 pharmacist vacancies went unfilled in 2000 and projections show those numbers rising in the future.

While there are fewer pharmacists to fill prescriptions, an aging baby boomer population is increasing the demand for prescription medications. Three billion prescriptions were filled nationwide in 2001, and that number is expected to rise to four billion by 2005.

This could be a prescription for disaster. According to the Institute for Safe Medical Practices, as many as four out of 100 prescriptions are filled improperly due to human error. These mistakes can result in patients taking the wrong medication or the wrong dosage and can lead to serious illness and even death.

New technology, however, is meeting these challenges head on. The automated pharmacy—using computer-driven robotics to dispense prescription drugs—is gaining wide-spread acceptance in hospitals, retail settings and home delivery pharmacies.

“Automated dispensing helps to increase safety and cost-efficiency and frees up pharmacists to concentrate on the important job of patient consultation,” says George Downs, dean of the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy.

Calvin Wasdyke knows well how automation helps consumers get their medications. As director of pharmacy services at the world's largest automated phar-



Automated systems are helping to make pharmacies safer and more convenient for consumers than ever before.

macy, Medco Health Solutions' Prescription Dispensing Center in Willingboro, N.J., Wasdyke oversees the filling of nearly 800,000 prescriptions a week.

“We've developed a system that is capable of meeting the increasing demand for prescription drugs while making the dispensing process as safe and accurate as possible,” says Wasdyke. “Technology is an essential tool for providing the best pharmacy care.”

While the use of automated pharmacy is growing, there will always be a need for the retail druggist to dispense short-term medications for acute conditions. And consumers still value the benefit of talking to a pharmacist, whether by phone or in person. But as the nation's population grows and the number of baby boomers needing medication increases, technology will continue to be relied upon to meet America's growing prescription needs.