

CASE STUDY: On-site Pharmacy Provides Affordable Treatment Alternatives for Patients

People, programs and technology come together to make a difference



ScriptPro 200 Robotic Prescription Dispensing System

SITUATION

People, whether they have health insurance or not, may feel they have few options when seeking affordable medical care. Often, they simply don't know about the options available to them. This lack of knowledge could put their health at risk.

Community health centers are known as primary care givers, offering essential medical care to anyone regardless of their ability to pay. This model has been successful for over 40 years. Many centers now offer a full spectrum of care which includes services in behavioral health, dental and in the specialty areas such as cardiology or obstetrics.

One area that is often overlooked, however, is the need for affordable pharmaceuticals. In order to offer a complete spectrum of care, a center needs to include as many treatment options as possible – especially one that can be administered at low-cost. Today, only one-third of community health centers in the country have on-site pharmacies.

SOLUTION

The pharmacy at Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center participates in several drug manufacturer patient assistance programs as well as the Federal 340B drug program, which allows uninsured patients to receive medications at a discounted price (based on a sliding fee scale). In addition, the pharmacy has established a Pharmacy Fund, which accepts donations and contributions from private donors to help uninsured patients receive medications.

Two clinical pharmacists are on staff, a rarity for community health centers. Clinical pharmacists work within the entire scope of drug therapy. They provide encouragement to those who may be scared or hesitant about a prognosis and its recommended treatment and work directly with patients to answer questions and ensure the proper administration of medication.

A signature feature of the pharmacy is its ScriptPro 200 Robotic Prescription Dispensing System. The robot and its associated technology allows for the hands-free counting, filling and labeling of prescriptions and processes 50-65% of the pharmacy's workload. The robot holds up to 200 of the pharmacy's fastest moving tablets and capsules, each stored in its own drug-dispensing cell. Each cell has a number, barcode and label. The barcode allows the robotic arm to select the proper cell and drug before it's filled into a vial. If a cell is misplaced, the robot will not fill the prescription and a warning message will sound alerting the staff.

Since the medication is dispensed directly from the cells into standard 12-40 gram vials, there is no cross-contamination. Calibration of the cells is performed on-site so that pharmacy staff can easily switch out medications.

RESULTS

Because of the services provided by the pharmacy and its devoted staff, patients are rarely turned away. In fact, the pharmacy has broken records for prescriptions filled.

In 2007, the pharmacy filled 57,807 prescriptions; in 2008 that number climbed to 61,169 and in 2009, prescriptions totaled 66,197.

During the first week of March 2010, a record 1,689 prescriptions were filled, the first time the pharmacy had ever filled over 1,600 in one week. A month later, during the first week of April 2010, 1,603 prescriptions were filled, once again exceeding expectations.

The Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center pharmacy has been recognized for its achievements by receiving a Performance Award during the first round of Health Resources Service Administration's Patient Safety & Clinical Pharmacy Collaborative. This award was presented for proven results in the areas of increased clinical pharmacy services, improved health outcomes, and systematic identification/prevention of adverse or potential adverse drug events.

The addition of the robot and its ability to accurately and efficiently dispense prescriptions increases the amount of time the pharmacy staff can give to patients. They are able to provide more direct counseling services while also reducing waiting times resulting in increased customer satisfaction.

Because of the pharmacy services provided at the Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center, patients in the Greater New Haven area have a place to go where they can feel safe and comfortable discussing their medical needs. And with financial stresses lifted because of the various programs available for the uninsured, patients are able to make their health a priority.

The pharmacy is located at Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center's main clinic on 428 Columbus Ave in New Haven.