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## OnDemand Accuflex from MTS Medication Technologies

By Fred Harris, RPh

**B**y 2005, I was facing some difficult decisions. Allcare Pharmacies of Arkansas had a successful pharmacy business, but to grow in a competitive marketplace, I needed to figure out how to add volume and new accounts without hiring more staff.

I have been in the pharmacy business a long time and have plenty of experience making tough decisions. I started with Allcare back when it was a small, independent retail pharmacy. Even in those early days, it was clear that the market would undergo dramatic changes and Allcare would have to change in order to meet those needs. More than 20 years ago, we created a specialized pharmacy concept that is the basis of the long-term care pharmacy model that we use to this day. Today, Allcare is still an independent pharmacy provider. In addition to our LTC pharmacy business, we operate retail pharmacies and provide pharmaceutical services to correctional facilities in the state of Arkansas. Our LTC pharmacy services 85 skilled nursing homes with a total of 5,000 beds. On average, we fill 35,000 prescriptions per month.

I knew that there was room for growth, but first, I had to determine how to increase Allcare's business without adding additional staff or compromising our accuracy level. To me, it seemed natural to seek the answer through automated medication packaging technology. At Allcare, we pride ourselves on our successful use of technology. Even though we are independent, we are still technologically advanced. We develop and maintain our own software and use Web-based software to manage operations within the pharmacy.



### System Selection

We looked at several companies with various automation formats. We reasoned that the success of any automation product would be based on meeting several key factors. Clearly, it had to meet our overall goal of

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increasing efficiency without hiring additional staff or adversely impacting our accuracy level. In addition, the equipment had to be flexible enough to use in our current operations, and it had to be priced so that we could get a good ROI. Finally, the size of the equipment had to be compact enough to fit in our 5,000-square-foot pharmacy without requiring remodeling. For most of the available automated systems to work with our pharmacy, we would have to make changes to our operations or packaging, but MTS Medication Technologies' OnDemand automated packaging system seemed a more natural fit.

MTS Accuflex was priced in a range that fit our budget and provided a good ROI. The system also proved to be very flexible. MTS developed an interface with our pharmacy information system that allowed us to insert the Accuflex automation into existing workflow processes. Accuflex even used the same disposables that we were already using for our manual packaging systems. Accuflex has the ability to automate multiple types of medication packaging, including standard punch card, unit dose box, and multi-medication. Finally, the size of the equipment was suitable for placement in our existing location.

### The Benefits of Automation

We installed Accuflex in our pharmacy in April 2006. Since then, we have been able to take the human intervention out of most areas of the filling process, as well as increase our volume without compromising our low error rate. Before the installation, it took a pharmacy tech an average of two minutes to fill one card. With Accuflex on-site for almost a year now, the average automated fill-time is two cards every minute. We have been able to fill prescriptions about four times faster with Accuflex.

Automation has also helped us to reduce our inventory-carrying cost. Before automation, we would pre-pack 30 to 60 days'

worth of fast-moving items that would then sit on a shelf until they were needed. Now, we are able to use a just-in-time filling method, filling patient prescriptions on demand. We have also reduced the time we spend preparing medications for delivery. Before Accuflex, we may have begun prep work on a large nursing home up to 15 days prior to the delivery date. That same home now has a prep time of three to five days, which represents a positive effect on cash flow.

Even with all the research and planning that went into selecting OnDemand Accuflex automation, we were pleasantly surprised to receive the additional benefit of its marketing impact on customers. Throughout the years, we have brought potential and existing customers into our pharmacy to show them how their prescriptions are processed. Since Accuflex has been installed, these on-site visits have an added "wow factor".

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Everyone is impressed by the level of technology and automation we use. They are fascinated when they see the robotic equipment fill the blister cards for their facilities. Seeing how the prescriptions are actually filled increases their confidence in all of the levels of service that they receive from Allcare. ■



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