

"We use the scheduling feature to fill all the prescriptions for a particular clinic or facility at the same time. This is particularly beneficial when many of the facility's patients take the same medications, such as a mental health facility or one that specializes in treating patients with HIV/AIDS," explains Patel.

Mail-Meds Clinical Pharmacy has carved out a niche in the marketplace by offering high quality pharmacy services to a specialized market, while remaining keenly focused on customer service.

"Everything we do is designed to help the patient stay adherent to their medications," says Theobald.

"We cycle fill meds so they're all due at the same time. We fill them in our 28-day cycle Med-Box so that the patient gets their delivery on the same weekday of every month. We provide personalized training for each patient so that they are completely comfortable with their medication packaging."

"We do this with the goal of helping patients stay out of the hospital or assisted living residence and by keeping them adherent to their medication regimens."

Mail-Meds Clinical Pharmacy takes over medication management for the patient so that they don't even have to think about it.

Everything we do is designed to help the patient stay adherent to their medications



CASE STUDY : MAIL-MEDS CLINICAL PHARMACY



Mark Theobald has been in the pharmacy business for more than 20 years. Like most visionaries, Theobald has been working on a dual track for the past two decades – building up his professional expertise while conducting an ongoing strategic assessment of the pharmacy marketplace.

This high level perspective enabled him to identify an opportunity to provide pharmaceutical services to a market segment with health care needs that were not being met by traditional pharmacies.

In 2004, Theobald founded Mail-Meds Clinical Pharmacy in Ft. Myers, Florida, to meet the needs of patients on complex drug regimens. He targeted clinics that serve disease states requiring multiple medications, such as HIV/AIDS, mental health, diabetes and congestive heart failure.

"Many people on multiple medications go to retail pharmacies or use mail order," explains Theobald. "But these pharmacies are not able to meet the needs of these patients. Studies have shown that more than 50% of people who take five or more medications a day do not adhere to their medication regimen."

According to Theobald, the primary reason for non-adherence is that patients don't understand how to take their medications.

Not only does this have a negative impact on the individual patient, but it adversely affects the entire health care system. The cost of medication non-adherence is staggering - estimated at approximately \$177 billion annually in total direct and indirect health care costs in the U.S.*

Theobald explains that studies show that patients who do not adhere to their medication regimens have dramatically more admissions to the hospital, increased doctor office visits, and more admissions into long-term care assisted living residences.

"The most important thing for most patients with chronic illnesses is to make sure they're taking their medications correctly - and that's what we do," explains Theobald. "We developed some unique products and services to help patients stick to their treatment plans."

A critical component of medication adherence is packaging. Retail pharmacies typically dispense medications in vials, forcing patients with multiple prescriptions to keep up with numerous containers with varying administration instructions and re-fill dates. The task of juggling these multiple vials often proves overwhelming.

The most important thing for patients with chronic illnesses is to make sure they're taking medications correctly

Mail-Meds simplifies the entire process with easy-to-use multi-medication packaging.

As soon as the pharmacy gets prescriptions from a new customer, Mail-Meds "cycles up" or short-fills the patient's prescriptions so that they all become due on the same date.

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* Enhancing Prescription Medicine Adherence: A National Action Plan, published by the National Council on Patient Information and Education, August 2007.

Then Mail-Meds packages the patient's prescriptions in their Med-Box™ Personalized Pill Box System. Each Med-Box is typically filled with all the medications that a patient takes at a particular time of day, such as morning, mid-day, evening or bedtime - eliminating anxiety about which pills to take at what time.



According to Mails-Meds Pharmacy Manager Rishi Patel, PharmD, MBA, "The Med-Box takes the guesswork out of medication administration. A patient simply picks up the appropriate Med-Box and pops the pills out from a single, designated compartment. That's all there is to it!"

To ensure that patients are comfortable with using the Med-Box, Mail-Meds provides personalized one-on-one instruction. When a new patient receives their first Med-Box, a member of the pharmacy staff trains the patient in the comfort of the patient's home.

"We deal with a lot of people who live alone and have no support services," says Theobald. "They need a lot more support from their pharmacy to be able to stay at home rather than being transitioned to an assisted living facility."

Mail-Meds' focus on personalized service is a key factor in their success, and has led to a significant growth of their business. As a result, the pharmacy faced new challenges.

One such challenge was the pharmacy's ability to keep up with demand.

Mail-Meds had been using a manual system to fill multi-med packages and it was becomingly increasingly difficult for pharmacy staff to keep up with demand during regular business hours.

"Employees often stayed late at night and sometimes had to work on the weekends to keep up with orders," Theobald says. "We reached the point where we exhausted our staff resources."

Mail-Meds' focus on personalized service is a key factor in their success

Within two years of opening, Mail-Meds knew that they would have to choose between automating or drastically increasing staff.

Theobald and his team explored options with multi-med packaging automation, and quickly learned that there was not a lot from which to choose.

In fact, MTS Medication Technologies was the only company with automation that could put multiple medications in an organized package that was easy to use for the pharmacy and the patient.

Mail-Meds reached an agreement with MTS to become the beta test site for the first MTS OnDemand® Multi-Med automated packaging system.

Within a few months, MTS had delivered the equipment and developed a customized interface for Mail-Meds. The machine "went live" at Mail-Meds Clinical Pharmacy in January 2007.

Theobald is pleased with the impact that automation has made on the pharmacy.

"What we really like about the OnDemand system is that it dramatically increased our workflow and allowed our business to continue growing. From the time that we first talked with MTS, our business has grown by another 40% and we haven't had to add a single person," he says. "We are able to process considerably more orders than the typical retail pharmacy with only a fraction of the staff."



Pharmacy Manager Patel knows first-hand the improvements that automation has made to the pharmacy's workflow.

"We typically run OnDemand Multi-Med for two or three hours a day. But those two to three hours of automation would take at least six to eight hours filling manually, and maybe a lot longer."

Although Patel initially ran the machine by himself, he ultimately decided to assign two technicians to run the machine at the same time.

"When you have two people managing the machine, you're zipping through it so much more efficiently," he explains.

Probably the biggest impact that automation has made to the pharmacy is the ability to adjust the workflow to meet workload demand. "Sometimes that machine is running all day," says Patel, "depending on how far we're trying to get ahead."

The pharmacy uses the software's "Fill Scheduler" feature to review upcoming prescriptions and determine the best time to put them into the workflow.

Before automation, a three-day weekend could wreak havoc on the pharmacy's workload. Now, the pharmacy is able to plan ahead by re-distributing the workload so that all the prescriptions affected by a holiday are filled in advance.

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The pharmacy re-opens for business after the break, and starts right back up from where they left off.

"OnDemand Multi-Med automation allows the pharmacy to increase its operational efficiencies," says Patel.