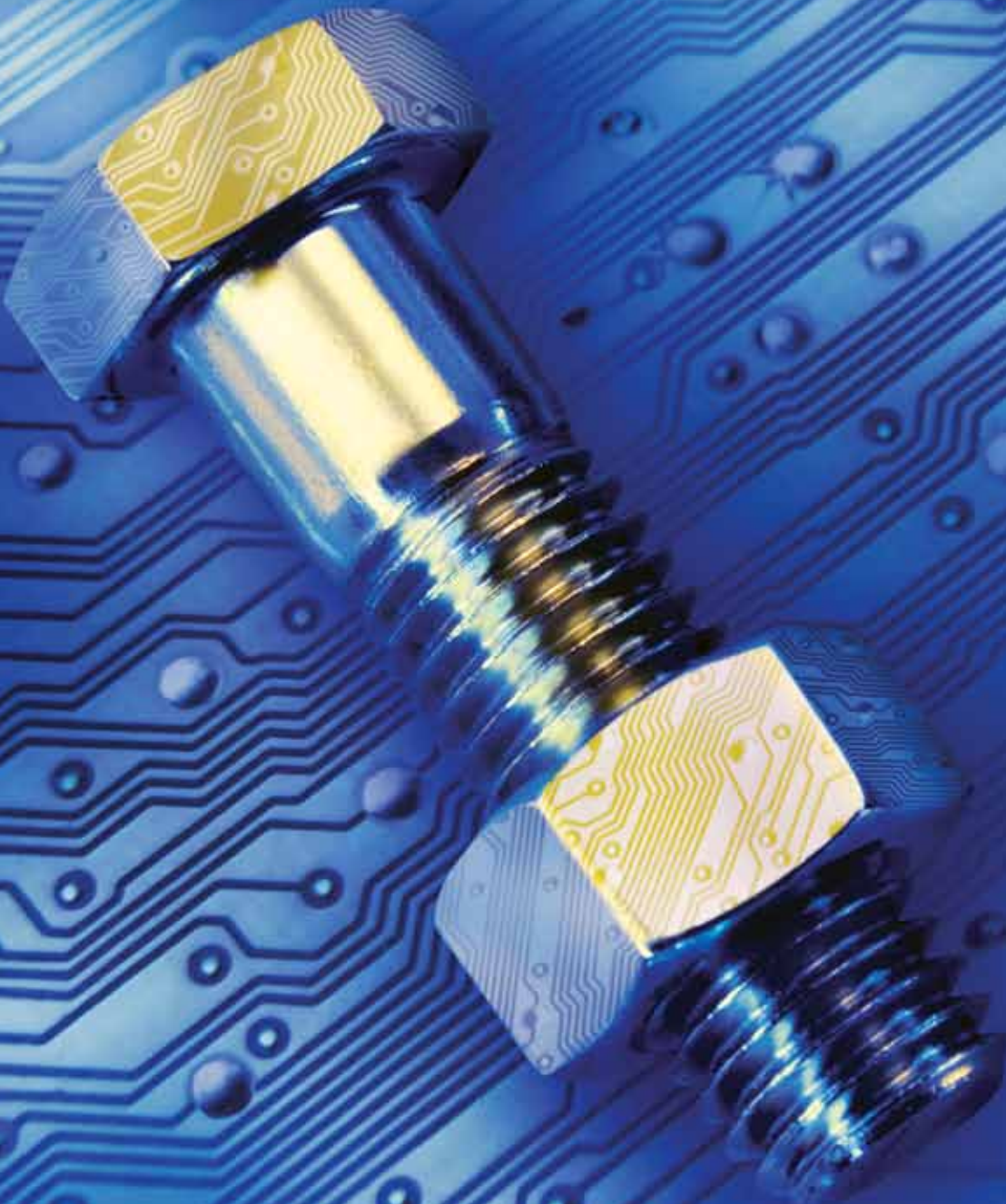


MASTER

OF



JOHN WILKES

THE NUTS-AND-BOLTS PHARMACY TECHNOLOGY

The screenshot shows a web-based self-assessment checklist for pharmacy technology. The title is "Pharmacy Technology Self-Assessment Checklist". Below the title, there is introductory text explaining the purpose of the tool. The form includes several sections: "How long has your pharmacy been in business?" with a dropdown menu; "What is your average daily prescription volume?" with a dropdown menu; "Pharmacy Management System" with input fields for Name, Vendor, and Approximate cost installed; "Operating System (if known)" with a dropdown menu; and "Patient Safety and Workflow Technologies Supported" which is a grid of checkboxes for various technologies such as Prescription Imaging, e-Pharmacy, and Patient notification of the website.

NCPA launches Internet-based technology resource for pharmacists and vendors

By Bill G. Felkey and Brent I. Fox

DURING THE NCPA CONVENTION

in Philadelphia in October, the NCPA Technology and Innovation Committee displayed a new, web-based resource which is available to improve pharmacist and vendor communication. The resource, which is now launched in version 1.0, is intended to be used for the identification, selection, and evaluation of pharmacy technology. The resource begins with a technology self-assessment instrument that pharmacists can use to determine what resources they own compared with a comprehensive listing of pharmacy technologies available in the marketplace. Early feedback indicates that even the most tech savvy pharmacists are impressed with how many resources are available to make their operations more efficient and effective.

Web Connected

Pharmacy technology vendors are being asked to complete the assessment tool to help communicate the technology coverage of their product lines and to give information on which features of the technologies are currently available, not available, or in development. Another feature of the site provides suggested questions that pharmacists should ask vendors before purchasing any featured product. These are provided in each of six initial pharmacy technology categories covered in the 1.0 launch. Numerous other technology vendors and vendor categories are scheduled to be included in the resource when it is expanded in the next two revisions during 2011.

Because the potential categories of pharmacy technology were so extensive, the committee decided to choose an initial set of seven categories for development in phase 1 of the project. The categories are pharmacy management systems, workflow technology, point of sale tools, integrated voice response applications, automation and robotics, long-term care and assisted living, and a miscellaneous "catch all" category which ultimately, was not included in the 1.0 launch. An extensive set of questions that pharmacists can use for due diligence during the product selection process were generated.



Technology Categories

PHARMACY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (PMS)
Software to manage data concerning the treatment of patients, dispensing of prescriptions, control of inventory, billing of claims, compliance with laws and regulations, and communications with other health care professionals.

POINT OF SALE (POS)
Management hardware and software to assist in retail transactions of prescription and nonprescription products at the point of interaction with patients and/or their representatives. Most solutions have inventory management, reporting, and electronic signature capture functionalities.

INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE (IVR)
This is a communication solution designed to offer an alternative interface for patients to interact with their pharmacy via telephone. Functionality has expanded to include professional messaging, emergency forwarding, outbound messaging, mobile interaction, and web interaction.

WORKFLOW (WF)
Technology solution to standardize the coordination of movement of product and information throughout all of the steps required to manage and dispense a prescription in a pharmacy from patient intake to payment. These solutions may be integrated or stand alone. Specific checkpoints of the process may differ between vendors and applications.

AUTOMATION (AUTO)
Hardware solution to perform repetitive functions associated with filling a prescription. These solutions are designed to fit in workflow patterns and interface with a PMS. The functionality may range from counting devices, used to verify manual counting, to full robotic solutions, which automate every component of a prescription fill.

LONG-TERM CARE (LTC)
Solutions spanning PMS, WF, and AUTO that assist in the service of the specific requirements of long-term care facilities.

MISCELLANEOUS (MISC)
Security, digital presence, etc...

The initial set of questions for each category were designed to help pharmacists determine product functionality for areas or features that they may not have normally considered. For example, suggested questions drill down into the ability of a POS system to handle lottery tickets, employee discounts, and other special circumstances such as dual-tender transactions. The articles we have generated for *ComputerTalk* and *America's Pharmacist* are supplied in an archive section.

Thus far, responses from both pharmacists and vendors to the new website have been positive. The technology resource was developed using the input of NCPA's membership, the vendor community, and the prolific pharmacy technology users on the Innovation and Technology Committee. As the project is viewed by the entire pharmacy technology marketplace and audience, it should get additional direction for enhancement.

The URL for the resource is <http://rxtechnologyresource.com>, and there are many interesting layers to explore even in the initial launch. By clicking on the Evaluation Tool tab, the interactive self-assessment tool mentioned previously is made available to the site visitor. This tool asks for demographic information to include the number of years the pharmacy practice has been in place, prescription volume, and the brand (and operating system) of the installed pharmacy management system. Once a pharmacist completes the assessment tool, if/then logic is used to develop and present targeted recommendations for additional technology to be considered for adoption in the practice.

Recommendations Vary

Certain technology recommendations vary according to the maturity of the pharmacy practice. The logic was developed by the committee to assist pharmacists in determining what core technology should be in place from the beginning and throughout the maturity of the practice. Thus, the recommendations will be different for the start of a new practice versus one that is between one and five years old, or more than five years old. At the end of the assessment, pharmacists are also supplied with a list of associated vendors with their contact information for each of the suggested technologies generated by the tool. Additionally, users of the tool are presented with buyer specific resources such as *ComputerTalk's* annual buyer's guide edition of the publication.

Committee members have generated narrative case studies for visitors to the site. These case studies are intended to help visitors understand the rationale that tech-savvy pharmacists used for sequencing the adoption of their practice technology. Suggestions range from initial purchases, special services application integration, and multi-store hosting interfaces. These narratives complement a comparative feature of the site where pharmacists learn how their adoption of technology compares with pharmacists from similar settings through graphical reports. In this way, visitors learn not only what technology to consider, but why a particular technology should be made a purchase priority. Reports such as the summary results of an ongoing series of technology focused surveys can be found on the new site as well.

Vendor Appeal

The next step of the enhancement of the new resource is to make an appeal to all pharmacy technology vendors to have them self-report the coverage of their product line within the technology assessment categories. Vendors should also be encouraged to list features and benefits offered by their individual products. These types of reports will eventually be connected to published feedback reports to vendors in various market segments where pharmacist survey results and other communication on the site could potentially help drive the prioritization of vendor product development efforts.

Along with the categories already mentioned, vendors who are supplying resources include those that focus on patient safety, specialty service areas, data security systems, pharmacy security and surveillance, website services, delivery technology, decision support, patient education, and telecommunication technologies are all welcome to participate. Future work of the committee will address these and other areas. This resource has already drawn attention from pharmacists who want a Spanish version of the tool created, and from vendors who are eager to tell the advantages offered by their applications. We believe that your use of the site, and the feedback you subsequently provide, will only help improve its value to the profession.

We recommend that you visit the resource immediately to get a flavor for what is there and what is to come. As always we welcome your comments, questions, and suggestions. We will forward any ideas we receive to the

A portion of the Pharmacy Technology Self-Assessment Checklist, found at www.RxTechnologyResource.com

NCPA staff and the Technology and Innovation Committee. Our e-mail addresses are felkebg@auburn.edu and foxbren@auburn.edu. **ap**

Bill G. Felkey is professor emeritus, and Brent I. Fox is assistant professor of Pharmacy Care Systems at Auburn University's Harrison School of Pharmacy.