



# Create a Prioritized Checklist for Adopting Pharmacy Technology

By Bill G. Felkey



I CONTINUE TO PREDICT THAT NO scenario for pharmacy practice will ever involve a decreased use of technology, especially in community pharmacy. Do you agree? Technology designed to support your practice in becoming more efficient and effective changes constantly, and new oppor-

tunities to expand your impact into the lives of your patients are arising. Think about what your next generation of patients will expect and demand of you. The NCPA Innovation and Technology Committee, newly chaired by Timothy Davis, is working to create tools designed to help you evaluate where you are and where you could go with the adoption of technology in your practice. I will try to stimulate your thinking on this topic by covering the most important categories of technology that you should be considering for acquisition or for enhancement of your existing pharmacy systems.

...community pharmacists are purchasing **multiple pharmacies** and will require a layer of technology called **chain host systems**.

The hub of your operation is always going to be the pharmacy management system. Vendors will either create and integrate products specific to the needs of your practice or affiliate with ancillary vendors to help you run your business and offer specific patient-care services. The core functionality for these systems is usually prescription dispensing, but other specialty functions—such as compounding, immunization, durable medical equipment, medication therapy management, long-term care, assisted living, inpatient and clinic connectivity, and hospice care—can replace that, or be interfaced as adjuncts to a more traditional distribution-focused system.

## CHAIN HOST SYSTEMS

Increasingly, community pharmacists are purchasing multiple pharmacies and will require a layer of technology called chain host systems. These allow for centralized management and oversight of multiple store-level operations. Other advanced technological systems, such as central fulfillment support, are available for multi-store operations. Some of them can facilitate an easier prescription transfer and aggregated medication profiles, and perform shared-workload capabilities when required. In this scenario, less-busy pharmacists can connect to the workload of other pharmacies and lend a hand.

Storefront point-of-sale, prescription department workflow, document management systems, digital signature capture, prescription intake and drug visual imaging, bar code scanning for safety purposes, IVR systems, and automation (in the form of counting or robotic systems) are all technologies designed to increase your workflow efficiency, significantly reduce medication errors, and enhance your ability to provide direct patient services beyond dispensing.

Each of these technologies can function independently, but the real benefit comes when they are fully integrated with your pharmacy practice management system. They all have features and benefits that can immediately improve your practice, but require due diligence on your part. Before you acquire them, you must determine whether you have the system requirements and physical space necessary to incorporate them into your practice appropriately to realize the benefits for which you are paying.

After you have fine tuned the distribution functions in your practice and supported other specialized practice needs, consider additional technology to enhance the business or back-office aspects of your practice. Into this functional category, fall optimization of billing technologies for DME, MTM, 340B, Medicare set-aside cards, pre- and post-edit analysis tools, prescription pricing, purchasing, inventory, and other levels of business oversight and processing. Many of these are already built into your practice management system, but you may not have found the time to incorporate them into your practice.

Other technologies help protect your practice, such as data security systems (for example, firewalls and virus/malware protection), off-site backup technologies, and pharmacy security and surveillance technologies. When you are transitioning between practice management systems, data conversion technology will facilitate the process. If you have a delivery service and technology for dispatching and management oversight, you can track deliveries in real time more affordably than before.

## WEB CONNECTIVITY

You should not ignore the Web presence and health-system level connectivity needed by the practice. The Internet should be central to the communication, display of patient-level content, online commerce, community building, and marketing activities for your practice. Every big chain is collecting patient e-mail addresses, and some ask for text-message contact information as well. Being able to connect to electronic health records, health system portals, personal health records from patients, eligibility databases, regulatory bodies, and registries for things like immunization is increasingly important.


At the service level, your pharmacy practice management system will integrate some clinical-decision support system (CDSS) tools, but you can use online, onscreen, and integrated portable information appliances to help reduce uncertainty when making clinical

decisions. Your patients are more likely to have a positive experience when interacting with your practice if you promote and use multimedia patient-education and language-translation tools. Online continuing education resources can support your personal and professional improvement.

The *Internet should be central* to the communication, display of patient-level content, online commerce, community building, and marketing activities *for your practice*.

Other technology categories for your consideration include after-hours dispensing kiosks, physician collaboration technologies, telepharmacy and remote dispensing systems, wholesaler and supply chain telecommunication technologies, technologies for assisting your heaviest prescribers with electronic prescribing tools, and technologies that monitor patient health status and medication regimen-adherence levels by means of devices you monitor from their homes. These categories of technology allow for the extension of the practice beyond the walls of the pharmacy. They also ensure that the practice will stay connected and relevant in the patient care process.

The categories mentioned here will be fleshed-out with the expected features and benefits offered by each, and will go into further detail for the kinds of subcategories of tools available. There are several working documents in progress for this effort, including a glossary of terms (if anything I wrote was new to you).

If you would like to be involved in the development and review process of these and other work related to pharmacy technology, you can e-mail me at felkebg@auburn.edu to be connected to the effort. As they said about the bionic man, "We have the technology; we can make him better..." 

---

Bill G. Felkey is professor emeritus at Auburn University's Harrison School of Pharmacy.