



An introduction to medicine collection point technology

From planning permission to patient recruitment, our essential overview covers everything you need to know about automated prescription collection points

If you're new to the idea of prescription collection technology, or you're not sure how it works, or just want to know how a medicine vending machine can help your pharmacy, this guide will answer your questions.

Because it covers a lot of territory, we've broken it down into key questions - and if you have any questions of your own, **get in touch** and we'll be happy to answer them.

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MARTON PHARMACY

Introduction

Pharmacy in the UK is changing. That's nothing new. What's new is the rate at which that change is happening and the pressure that is placing on independent contractors and multiples alike to continually adapt in order to keep pace.

The sector is being squeezed on several fronts: funding is stagnating, dispensing fees are in overall decline, income from clinical services has been slow to materialise, quotas are placing undue limitations on medicines supply, internet pharmacy is taking ever-greater market share, workloads are rising, patient demands are increasing – and that's without mentioning the incredible difficulties pharmacies have had to overcome in order to maintain service levels during the coronavirus pandemic.

Putting it all together, it is clear that longer-term thinking is required to build adaptability and safeguard profitability for the future.



How can automation help?

The word 'automation' carries connotations of vast factories staffed by robots and ruled by faceless computer systems. Thankfully, that's not how it works in pharmacy. Automation can simply be used to introduce greater efficiency to the pharmacy workflow, whether that's using a picking machine to support dispensing or an automated kiosk like the Pharmaself24 to enable patients to collect their medicines.

With greater efficiency, these labour-intensive processes place less of a burden on staff while increasing the potential throughput of medicines.

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LINDSAY & GILMOUR EAST CALDER PHARMACY

How do medicine vending machines work?

Installing a medicine vending machine or prescription collection point such as the Pharmaself24 is like adding another pair of hands to the pharmacy team.

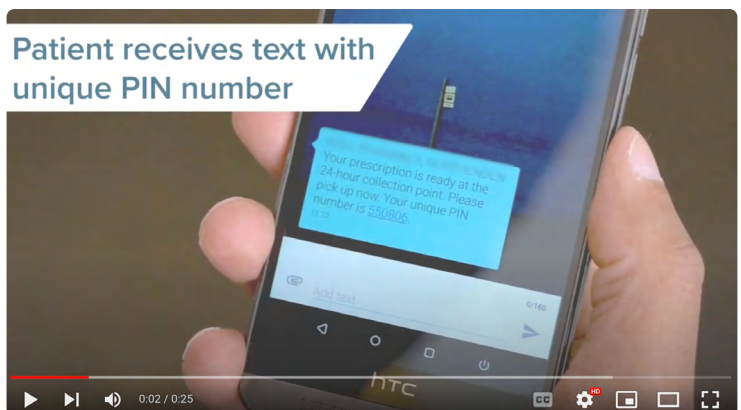
- Prescriptions are prepared and bagged as normal but instead of waiting on a shelf to be handed out, they are loaded in bulk into the Pharmaself24.
- At the point an individual bag is loaded, the patient in question is sent an SMS alert to tell them their medicines are ready to be collected.
- The text message contains a unique six-digit code and information on how long they have to pick up their medicines.
- Using the touchscreen built into the Pharmaself24, the patient then enters their PIN code, makes payment where required and then receives their bagged medicines.

It's an entirely familiar experience, very similar to using a drinks vending machine or cashpoint.



Watch: Patients receive a text message to alert them when their medicines are ready for collection.

Patient receives text with unique PIN number



What are the benefits for patients?

Convenience. Our lives have become increasingly busy in recent years, compressing the amount of time we have available for everyday tasks. Technology can often provide the answer - or at least support more efficient ways of doing things. For patients juggling work, family and other commitments, there is a real benefit in knowing you can collect your medicines any time of the day, any day of the week. More than that, you know there will be no waiting in a queue, and no chance of your prescription not being ready after having made the journey to the pharmacy.

Those on repeats can order via the NHS app from the comfort of their sofa, knowing that their prescriptions will be sent to their nominated pharmacy who will alert them when their medicines are ready to be collected. In the meantime, patients can go about their normal lives, just waiting for a text to arrive - that's an unrivalled level of convenience with huge benefits for patients and for pharmacies alike.

Will it have an impact on dispensing staff?

After an initial period of training and adjustment, the real impact of a collection point on a pharmacy and its team becomes apparent. Consider the fact that for every prescription handed out, one of your counter staff must spend several minutes retrieving the item and then handing it out to the patient in question. And that's not even taking into account the times when you're looking for scripts that are on the wrong shelf, those with an owing, or those that haven't even arrived from the surgery.

When you add up all the time spent handing out medicines and multiply it by the number of prescriptions handled over the course of, say, a month, you can begin to understand the total amount of time and effort that can be reclaimed by the pharmacy team.

For example, someone dispensing 10,000 - 15,000 items per month could have 500-800 people a week who collect from the PS24.

- That's 500-800 people who don't queue
- 500-800 bags not sat on a shelf
- 500-800 times a member of staff doesn't spend 3-4 minutes handing out a bag.

And that's not a theoretical scenario - those are real numbers based on actual customer data.



Watch: Zia Ashraf, owner of HMI Pharmacy, discusses his decision to invest in automated collection technology with a Pharmaself24, and how it has driven significant growth in prescription numbers.



How will it change the pharmacy environment?

Although we Brits are supposed to love a queue, they are a depressingly familiar site in pharmacies across the country. Far from being welcomed, they are a source of frustration for patients, many of whom are time-poor, do not have any questions, and are simply looking for a smooth, speedy collection experience.

Negative experiences create a bad impression and can erode customer loyalty. They can also create difficult conditions for staff, who face the pressure of managing peaks in demand, where the shop is full of queuing patients whose emotions range from disappointed acceptance all the way up to irritation and even anger.

While a Pharmaself24 won't eradicate queues entirely, it can have a transformational effect on the pharmacy environment, easing the pressure on staff.

What about the patient relationship?

The truth is that different patients want different things - the rising popularity of internet pharmacy is certainly evidence that patients are seeking out alternative options in the interests of greater convenience. In the traditional pharmacy model, the method for accessing medicine is limited to either visiting the pharmacy or requesting home delivery.

With technology such as the Pharmaself24, patients can be offered far more flexibility and control, while still being able to access the vital services that can only be provided by qualified pharmacy professionals.

The two things are not mutually exclusive - they are complementary aspects of a multi-dimensional, modern pharmacy offering that can help grow prescription business and strengthen patient loyalty for the longer term.

Will I need planning permission?

Yes, planning permission will be required, but it's a straightforward process in which we have a great deal of experience. We can talk you through how it works and support you in completing the necessary documentation.

- The starting point is a site visit, where we discuss with you where best to locate the Pharmaself24 in your premises, taking into account available window and wall space as well as the need to integrate with your dispensary workflow and aspects such as patient accessibility, lighting and security (CCTV).
- We even think about how the Pharmaself24 fits with local surroundings, which may be a concern if you are situated in a conservation area, for example. Any adjustments are typically reversible but you will need to receive the landlord's consent if you're not the freeholder.
- We work with a planning consultancy who can manage the entire process from start to finish, speeding your approval through in 6-8 weeks. Importantly, we do not expect you to sign a contract until planning permission is confirmed.
- There is also the potential to apply for permission retrospectively. While this would be done at your own risk, we have seen evidence of a more lenient approach to consent from some local authorities during the pandemic.

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DAVIDSONS CHEMIST PHARMACY



← A Pharmaself24 being prepared for a UK customer at Videosystem's manufacturing facilities in Schio, Italy.

How do I know it will work for my pharmacy?

We know every pharmacy is different. We communicate with all of our customers to understand what they want from their Pharmaself24 and how we can help them achieve that as efficiently and effectively as possible.

We have a strong relationship with our OEM partner, Videosystem, which has been manufacturing Pharmaself24s from its factory in Schio, Italy for the past ten years. Machines can be built to order, incorporating bespoke modifications to accommodate unique building attributes or simply for patient convenience or design aesthetics.

Both the standard and compact versions of the Pharmaself24 are available in a range of colours and have the option to include branding on the machine itself and on the front screen, ensuring it not only fits into the existing surroundings but enhances them with its sleek Italian design and high-quality engineered steel finish.

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ROWLANDS PHARMACY, PORTSMOUTH

Will my team get any training?

The Pharmaself24 is as much an investment in people as it is technology.

As part of our installation process, we provide a clear training plan to familiarise and upskill staff, ensuring the Pharmaself24 integrates seamlessly into your day-to-day operations. Everyone in the team is involved, with counter staff playing a particularly important role in selling the service and answering patient queries.

Training takes place on the day following installation, with practical guidance on loading and removing bags as well as an overview of the core back-end functions and problem-solving scenarios. We also provide an SOP template that can be personalised for your particular setting.

Up to two members of the team will be allocated as superusers with admin rights to deal with any low-level support issues, which are flagged automatically via text and email. These alerts are also received by Omnicell, and we are always on-hand to provide back-up support, with 99% of queries dealt with remotely.



Watch: The Pharmaself24's fast-loading function means multiple bags can be loaded in a matter of minutes.





← Clear signage, as seen here at Right Medicine Pharmacy's Winchburgh branch, showcases how easy it is to use the Pharmaself24.

Will it help attract new patients?

Prior to installation, we can work with customers to undertake analysis of their local area, looking at data on prescription numbers and trends to understand the market and identify where there are threats and opportunities.

Once installed, it's important to give consideration to how you will promote the Pharmaself24, building awareness among both existing and new patients.

We help by sharing knowledge and best practice from across the Pharmaself24 customer base with a view to achieving your objectives. We can provide:

- Examples of graphics used on windows
- Wording to be included on the front screen (which can be changed as frequently as you like)
- Ways to encourage patients to complete sign-up forms (including EPS nomination details in England).

Based on our experience, we can also advise on broader marketing efforts, such as leafleting and engaging local media, and we partner with Pharmacy Mentor to help you get the most from social media advertising that can be targeted by postcode.

Alongside all these marketing efforts, as part of our ongoing support we also provide you with growth targets and benchmarks for similar size pharmacies to ensure you're on track.

How disruptive is the installation process?

We have a wealth of experience in installing Pharmaself24 collection points within multiples, independents, healthcare centres, dispensing GP practices - even prison pharmacies - and in a wide variety of buildings, from the historic to the brand new.

Detailed planning ensures the process is carried out smoothly and disruption is kept to an absolute minimum. More straightforward installations involve the removal of a window but we are also used to problem-solving more complex locations or working alongside shopfitters to dovetail installation with a wider project to improve the pharmacy layout.

All physical prep work is carried out the day before, installation itself is scheduled for the early hours of the morning, and we aim for it to be complete by the time the first patients arrive. Once in, it's case of plug and play - all the Pharmaself24 requires is power and a network connection before the commissioning process and all necessary checks can be carried out.

What level of support can I expect as a Pharmaself24 customer?

We make a clear commitment to our customers that when they buy a machine, they're not only buying into the technical expertise of Videosystem, they're buying into the personal experiences and close involvement of us here at Omnicell.

We provide on-demand assistance as you get up-to-speed in the early days post-installation, with ongoing remote technical help and any face-to-face maintenance wherever necessary. Servicing is carried out on an annual basis to check hardware and deep clean the Pharmaself24. It also provides an opportunity to implement any software upgrades, further to the incremental upgrades that are carried out remotely as part of our central development programme.

Conclusion

This article began with the statement that pharmacy is changing and changing fast. And it will never go back to the way it was before. Today, building a healthy pharmacy business with the potential to grow prescription numbers – one that can operate efficiently and profitably - requires a vision of how pharmacy is changing and the appetite to adapt.

Our customers – some of the most forward-thinking innovators in UK pharmacy – have shown that automated medicine collection can play a major part in their successful transformation to this new model.

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CHILLINGTON SURGERY, DEVON

Next steps

- 1 Get in touch and begin your conversation with us.
- 2 We'll arrange a visit to one of our sites to see the Pharmaself24 in action, a visit to your pharmacy, or both.
- 3 We'll help with planning permission via our specialist consultant and support you in completing the pre-installation checklist.
- 4 Installation and training is carried out according to an agreed plan.
- 5 You're up and running! We'll support you with marketing advice to build momentum with existing and new patients.



Any questions?

We'll be happy to answer any further questions you might have. Just complete [this form](#) and we'll be in touch.