

How eRefill processes can increase efficiency in post-acute facilities and senior living communities

Omnicare[®], a CVS Health[®] company
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Accurate, timely refills are an important element in the plan of care for residents in senior living communities, and even more so for those in post-acute facilities. These are often older, more vulnerable people with multiple medical conditions, and who depend on staff for access to their medications. Almost all of these residents use at least one medication, with post-acute residents being prescribed an average of 14 medications. They are frequently long-term, maintenance medications for conditions such as Alzheimer's disease and arthritis.

Yet many of the traditional methods still being used to refill prescriptions have not advanced with the rest of medical care, and rely on manual steps and analog technology that can impact efficiency and have increased potential for error. Add to that the close scrutiny on medication errors from regulators, and there are plenty of reasons to turn to electronic reordering, known as eRefills. With faster, more accurate information exchange, and the resulting gains in efficiency, eRefills are a major improvement over the old, traditional methods for placing refill orders.

Fax machines

Faxing is old technology. After all, the first fax was patented in 1843. But faxes still play a major role in submitting refill orders at many post-acute facilities and senior living communities. A common procedure is for nurses to collect bar code stickers from residents' medications, then paste as many as 30 per page on a piece of paper and fax it to the pharmacy. At

Omnicare[®], a CVS Health[®] company, incoming faxes go directly into the pharmacy's digital systems, where pharmacists and technicians begin checking and processing the request.

But fax machines provide little two-way communication for each order. When nurses submit medication refill requests via fax they will receive a standard confirmation that the fax transmission went through, however they will not receive any information regarding the actual status of the medications being ordered. For example, nurses will not receive notifications on whether the refill order was submitted too soon, if a prior authorization is required or any other issue that may affect the processing of the order. The lack of transparency at this critical point in the pharmacy fulfillment process can have a trickle-down effect on efficiency, as both nurses and the pharmacy team may need to follow up via phone to confirm orders and/or address and resolve issues.

Integrated voice recognition

Many pharmacies offer phone-based integrated voice recognition (IVR), in which prompts from an automated attendant direct the caller to speak the prescription number for each order or punch it into the telephone keypad. The information is then recorded and processed by the pharmacy. Like faxing, IVR is not considered electronic technology because of the analog function of a person manually entering information into the phone. This is a labor-intensive approach, with nurses leaving the floor to submit a

Omniview simplifies the refill process and saves time.

batch of refills, often requiring 5–10 minutes for several refills at a time. Nurses can easily run into problems with an IVR system, including background noise interfering with the system’s voice recognition, or distraction from their heavy workload while entering multiple prescription numbers. This creates a risk for error which could require even more work to correct. However, these systems are still more efficient than a completely manual process such as asking someone to handwrite a prescription number during a phone conversation.

Phone calls

Phone calls are also traditional refill methods, and while calls offer an opportunity for feedback from the pharmacy, there is still potential for error. The nurse still has to leave the floor and make time for a call, and may read the refill information incorrectly on the phone. Compared to an instantaneous digital submission, the time for both a nurse and a pharmacist to talk on the phone for simple refill orders is not the best use of resources. Pharmacy technicians or pharmacists may handwrite the order as they receive it, with the risk they may transcribe it incorrectly, or that their handwriting may be misread as it’s later entered into the system. The verbal confirmation they give to the ordering nurse is not as information-rich as an electronic confirmation can be, nor does it offer visibility to supervisors or others who are not likely on the call. And calls usually offer no firm indication about if and when the medication may be coming, or whether the payer will approve the medication refill.

eRefills: Accurate and efficient

Digital technology has opened the door to options with better accuracy and greater efficiency when submitting refills in senior living communities and post-acute facilities. This digital path is commonly known as “eRefill.” Omnicare, a pharmacy with some of the industry’s most innovative technological capabilities, receives eRefill orders through multiple channels, including its Omniview[®] platform, Electronic Medical Record (EMR) tie-ins and smartphone apps.

Omniview

Omniview is an online platform that simplifies the refill process and saves time. A key to the Omniview technology is the proprietary scanner technology that transmits data instantly and gives immediate feedback to the ordering nurse. Nurses may still bring the bar



Proprietary scanner technology transmits data instantly

The EMR process is fast and accurate.

code labels from medications back to their work station. However, instead of faxing or calling them in, they use a scanner to read the bar code, which is linked to the resident, drug and dose. Ordering with the push of a button, the nurse instantly sees Omnicare's confirmation of the order on a screen, leaving no question about whether the order has been transmitted successfully. In that moment, the Omnicare system quickly and automatically checks if the resident is active in the system, whether any refills are left on the original order, whether it is too soon to refill and whether the payer approves the refill.

For example, a nurse submitting multiple refill orders may learn immediately that one may be out of refills or another is being submitted too soon. With that information available from a simple click of the button, the nurse can call the pharmacy right away to resolve the issues and avoid unnecessary delay in getting the refill, so the problem will not linger for the next shift to investigate.

EMR tie-ins

The eRefill technology that is most time-efficient and guards against the most errors is a tie-in with the EMR software that nurses already use for so much of the rest of their work. Omnicare already has tie-ins with many of the largest EMR software vendors in the market.

To submit a refill, nurses who are administering medication while in the EMR package simply push a reorder button on the screen. The system offers real-

time accountability, verifying for the nurse and other care providers that the refill order was placed, when, by whom and for whom, and what medication it was for. The opportunity for errors is greatly reduced, with no bar code stickers, no scanners, no phones, no fax machines and no handwriting. The entire process is fast and accurate, and, when multiplied by all the residents that all the nurses will see throughout a day, translates to major time savings.

Smartphone apps

Like some pharmacy providers, Omnicare offers a smartphone app as a digital portal to access dispensing systems. It uses the phone's camera to scan prescription bar codes and then passes that

With eRefill tied into the EMR software, the opportunity for errors is greatly reduced.

information on to Omnicare, much the same as the previously described scanners do. And just as with the scanners, the nurse receives immediate feedback on whether the order can be filled, payer adjudication and when it will be delivered. Because it does not retain any personal health information, it can be used on the nurse's personal smartphone in facilities and communities that allow them.

eRefills represent a big opportunity to improve performance and drive costs lower.

Summary

All eRefill options save time, reduce the opportunity for human error, and free nurses and pharmacists from clerical chores that pull them from more important responsibilities in resident care. Considering the huge amounts of time nurses spend each day just to pass medication, eRefills represent one of the healthcare industry's biggest opportunities to improve performance and drive costs lower.

Sources

¹ Saraf, Peterson, Simmons, et al. Medications associated with geriatric syndromes and their prevalence in older hospitalized adults discharged to skilled nursing facilities. *Journal of Hospital Medicine* 2016.