CRM: The Cure for Pharmacy Hopping

I am a pharmacy hopper. I transfer my prescriptions from pharmacy to pharmacy each month to take advantage of the gift cards, gasoline discounts, and other “loyalty” rewards offered by various pharmacies. There are many others like me. I’m a pharmacist and I am able to perform my own drug utilization review to make sure that the medications I take do not interact with each other and will not harm me. However, most pharmacy hoppers probably are not pharmacists, and thus could experience adverse events, drug-drug interactions, and other problems associated with pharmacy hopping. Medical research has shown that this practice contributes to adverse drug events. Pharmacists have recognized this issue and encourage their customers to get all of their prescriptions filled at one pharmacy. So it’s interesting that pharmacists offer incentives that serve to encourage pharmacy hopping. The root of the issue, though, is not a $20 gift card — it is the perception that there are relatively few differentiating factors among pharmacies that create enough value for a customer to want to use only one pharmacy or pharmacy chain.

Customer relationship management can help pharmacists provide personalized service.

Make it Personal

The WilsonRx Pharmacy Satisfaction Survey, conducted in 2008, identified customers’ perceptions of the most important issues in pharmacy professional service. According to the survey, many of the respondents indicated that the most important issues in pharmacy are having prescriptions that are filled accurately and labels that are easy to understand. Certainly, these are critical components for any pharmacy. Many pharmacists may not realize there’s another important service that customers would like to receive — personalized care. The survey also found that 70% of respondents indicated that this is an important or very important concern. Personalized care is a component of personalized service. Pharmacies can increase customer loyalty and sales by emphasizing personalized service.

One way to provide personalized service is through frequent and informative communication with your customers. The business world has long recognized the value of personalized communication with customers as a way to build loyalty and increase profitability. Pharmacy has begun to realize this, but the challenge is, how can pharmacists provide personalized service with increasing prescription volume, complex insurance issues, and clinical services demanding more of their time? Customer relationship management can help pharmacists provide personalized service.

CRM Defined

Customer relationship management (CRM) in retail pharmacy is the process of identifying your customers, understanding their needs, and building relationships with them to improve their health, gain their trust, and increase your professional and financial rewards. A variety of tools can be used to automate portions of the CRM process, including interactive voice response (IVR) or CRM software, either from a specialized CRM soft-
To customers’ cell phones if that is their preferred method of communication.

CRM tools are designed to expand the types of contacts you make with customers, target the method of communication preferred by the customer, and optimize the frequency of those contacts. Additional communication reasons may include reminding your MTM customers when their next appointment is scheduled, or inform college-bound students and their parents that you will be offering the meningococcal vaccine, one of the vaccines often recommended for college freshmen. These examples target a specific type of customer, can be tailored to a specific communication medium, and should be delivered at a specific time.

Many companies offer CRM software, including Maximizer and ACT. Some companies offer healthcare-specific CRM software, including Microsoft Dynamics CRM for Healthcare and Surado CRM Health. These software solutions provide much more than a reminder to call a patient, or a searchable report to identify patients who are overdue for refills; CRM software can be used to send automatic reminders to patients about upcoming MTM appointments, alert patients with medication compliance messaging, and keep records of communications with patients. The costs of CRM software solutions vary widely, depending on the type of offering (online, on premise, or partner hosted), and the types of services provided. Costs for the software start in the range of $44 to $60 per user per month, but can rise with increasing levels of involvement and service.

Customer retention strategies can also be implemented using CRM, such as communications to customers who have not shopped at the pharmacy recently, or to customers who recently transferred a prescription out of your pharmacy. Applications of CRM are not limited to pharmacy products, and services; you may want to use CRM to promote specials on over-the-counter medications or front-end merchandise.

### Making CRM Work for You

If you are interested in using CRM as a way to differentiate your pharmacy, consider your current business processes and determine what activities you already do that may relate to CRM. Next, identify your current pharmacy customers. Which subset(s) of customers do you want to target with CRM initiatives? Also consider what organizational changes may be necessary for CRM to work. What level of staff involvement will be needed? What type of training will this require? For example, if a customer receives a letter or email that appears to be from his or her local trusted pharmacist but is actually generated by a CRM tool, the customer will expect that the local pharmacist is aware of the letter or email and is familiar with its content. The staff will need to be trained on CRM concepts and how these practices impact their job responsibilities.

CRM experts caution that more technology is not necessarily better. You may only need to make minimal changes to implement a CRM solution that works for your pharmacy. Talk to your software and/or IVR vendors about how to integrate CRM functionality into current pharmacy dispensing and

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workflow. Experts also caution those considering implementing CRM to remember that they are trying to build relationships with their customers, not annoy them. To build good relationships, consider first what you know about your customers, and then use that knowledge to personalize future interactions (see box at right).

An Opportunity

CRM represents a great opportunity to reach customers and stand out from other pharmacies. The cost of CRM should be compared to its potential benefits. You should evaluate the costs associated with implementing CRM with your current marketing and customer retention strategies. Perhaps dollars that are currently spent sending gift cards and gas discounts to “pharmacy hoppers” might be better spent building relationships with customers through targeted, personalized communication and pharmacy services.

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When implementing a CRM program, keep in mind some key communication concepts:

- Ensure that your communications are HIPAA compliant.
- Use an easily readable font and point size for all print and email communications.
- Consider your customers’ level of health literacy and tailor communications accordingly.
- When texting customers, be concise and professional. Don’t use confusing abbreviations or slang such as “CU @ KRAUSE’S PHCY 4 UR FLU SHOT.”

BestRxWin Now Offers True E-Prescribing

- Touch-Screen Available
- E-Signature Pad
- Quick New and Refill Rx Processing
- Flexible Search Engine & Price Schedule
- Claims Payment Reconciliation
- Refill Reminder Listings
- Multiple Rx Transmittals
- A/R & Perpetual Inventory
- Weekly Price Updates
- Laser, Dot Matrix, and Thermal Printer Support
- Extended Support Hours, 7 Days a Week
- Web Support for File Downloads — Including Price Updates & Program Updates
- Transmit Claims in 3 Seconds on the INTERNET
- Management Reports and Many More

Along with the basic BestRxWin software package, we offer additional integrated features that will keep your pharmacy on the leading edge.

Delivery Management – Track the status of delivery prescriptions with delivery management reports. Also has the ability to capture electronic signatures with the use of a mobile delivery device.

Interactive Voice Response – Your customers can call in and automatically order a refill without having to talk to anyone at your pharmacy. We currently interface with a number of popular IVR systems.

E-Prescribing – Receive new prescriptions from and send refill requests to prescribers electronically over the Internet. Improves efficiency and reduces prescription filling errors.

Rx Image Scanning – Scan and store prescription images on your computer, displaying on-screen with the stroke of a key. Batch scan multiple prescriptions or one at a time.

POS – The BestPOS system is fully integrated with BestRxWin, e-signature capture, and A/R. Using touch-screen technology to improve data entry, it can process credit/debit cards as well as check verification. Fully integrated with the major wholesalers so you can download orders to update the inventory and price updates.

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