



NEWS RELEASE

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Pharmacies upgrade for safety

New system prevents dispensing errors

HEIDELBERG, Germany – New equipment and software now being installed in Army pharmacies across Europe virtually eliminates the possibility of errors when dispensing thousands of medications each day, says Col. Curt Hansen, pharmacy consultant for the Europe Regional Medical Command.

“Although ERMC pharmacies take pride in providing excellent service, we are always exploring ways to ensure patients receive their medications safely,” said Hansen. “This new software system enhances medication safety by standardizing the filling processes and adding multiple automated checks,” he added.

ERMC pharmacies dispense up to 2,000 prescriptions each day - a substantial workload for any pharmacy staff. The new software increases staff efficiency and effectiveness by requiring additional checks to ensure that the correct medication is selected and dispensed. During the prescription filling process, the system generates a prescription label that incorporates barcode technology. While scanning the label, pharmacy staff can view monitors with a picture and description of the medication. Pharmacists can ensure the selected product matches the prescription label barcode before completing the final verification.

“Using the software correctly will virtually eliminate the potential for a prescription error” according to Maj. Eric Maroyka, pharmacy department chief of Heidelberg Community Hospital pharmacies.

Maroyka said professional and legal considerations require pharmacists to perform a two-point checking process when filling prescriptions: First, a pharmacy technician must fill the prescription and check it against the medication pictured on the monitor. A licensed pharmacist who compares the prescription label and medication against the original prescription must complete the second and most important check. These two steps verify and assure the selected medication is correct.

“The new pharmacy automation system enhances this checking process and provides a safer dispensing environment for our patients,” said Maroyka.

“Patients may have to wait a few extra minutes for their prescriptions as the pharmacy staff learns the new procedures,” said Maj. Ron Foley, pharmacy department chief of the Bavarian (formerly Wurzburg) Community pharmacies. Foley explained that the procedural steps will initially slow down the dispensing process during each pharmacy’s start-up phase, “but this is well worth the time for the additional safety benefits.”

Since patients are served on a first-come, first-served basis instead of by appointments, pharmacies cannot predict the volume of patients on a given day. For this reason, Hansen encourages patients to use ERMC’s automated prescription refill system that is available 24 hours, seven days a week.

“The phone-in refill service is linked to your local hospital or clinic’s computer system and processes the refill order for pick-up the next working day,” said Hansen. Pharmacies complete the refill prescriptions early each morning when the new prescription workload is typically low. “Using the refill service allows ERMC pharmacies to take care of patients waiting for new prescriptions, and it shortens the overall waiting time,” added Hansen.

“We strongly recommend using the phone-in service because it is user-friendly and can be accessed by calling DSN 486-5601 or toll-free civilian 00800-7446-2500,” said Maroyka. “Once connected to the system, simply follow the automated prompts. You can select any ERMC pharmacy to pick-up your medications.”

Maroyka advises patients to keep a two-week supply of maintenance medications on hand and to check with your local pharmacy to ensure any specially procured medications are available. With the new software system, patients can feel secure in the knowledge they are taking the proper medication.