

## Med center has 'vending machine' for drugs

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**BIG RAPIDS --** Netty Cove believes the Mecosta County Medical Center has found a way to nudge discharged ER patients to take their medicine, and the solution resembles a vending machine.

Cove, MCMC's chief clinical officer, said about 20 percent of about 22,000 people a year treated in the hospital's emergency department skip getting their prescriptions filled.

MCMC took steps in April to close that gap with an automated ATM-style dispenser of prescription medications located inside the emergency department's waiting room.

The InstyMeds machine provides 63 prescription drugs, plus some over-the-counter medications patients can buy such as Motrin, Tylenol, Claritin, Robitussin-DM and Benadryl.

So far, MCMC is the only hospital in Michigan that has a lease agreement, but Eden Prairie, Minn.-based InstyMeds Corp. is working on agreements to expand the automated service to other health care facilities in West Michigan, said Bob Bang, marketing and sales director.

MCMC staff decided to give the automated ATM-style dispenser a try to make it more convenient for patients to fill their prescriptions. The hospital is in a rural area where 24-hour pharmacies are not available, Cove said.

"Last year, I took a group of staff to a hospital in Wisconsin and, while we were getting a tour, I saw this interesting machine by the ER waiting room," Cove said. "They told me it was InstyMeds equipment. I thought it was just a wonderful service."

Spectrum Health spokesman Bruce Rossman said health care officials told him the dispenser system appears fail-safe as long as someone is available to answer patients' questions.

"I can see a hospital that doesn't have 24-hour pharmacy would be interested in this as long as the system is secure which it appears to be," he said.

Mark Lewis, Holland Hospital pharmacy manager, said it would be important to inform patients which prescriptions could make them too drowsy to drive.

"I would say it is, with the right circumstance, a very appropriate service," he said. "It sounds like all the safeguards are there, that you can't just walk out with them in your hand. A nurse and pharmacist are in close contact, so it makes sense to me."

Security features are built into the system, he said.

In the emergency department, patients' insurance cards are scanned into the InstyMeds system when they check in.

The system gives patients the option of using the machine or having their prescription filled elsewhere.

After treating patients, physicians order prescriptions electronically, eliminating those pesky, illegible handwriting concerns.

Those who decide to use InstyMeds get a personal identification number and drug information sheets.

At the InstyMeds machine, patients enter the access number and their birth date on a touch screen.

Four cameras whirring inside the automated dispenser verify who used it.

"When patients enter that PIN number, the machine then asks for a registered nurse," Cove said. "The RN puts her PIN in and the prescription is dispensed."

A phone next to the machine is available in case patients need to ask a pharmacist questions.

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