



Vending machine offers meds, instant relief

'ATM for drugs' device at Gresham Urgent Care first one in Oregon

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A filled prescription in the hand is better than two pieces of paper in the pocket. That's the basic philosophy behind InstyMeds, a fully automated medical prescription dispenser system making its way into Oregon.

Resembling a large automatic bank teller machine, InstyMeds allows patients to fill prescriptions for a reasonable price using nothing more than a touch screen and debit card. In pain after treating a sprained ankle and the local pharmacy's closed? Don't want to suffer for an hour in line with children in tow? The InstyMeds dispenser in the care center lobby may be the solution.

Oregon's first InstyMeds dispenser recently landed at Gresham Urgent Care Center, 2850 S.E. Powell Valley Road. The machine is set up for direct patient use, but is behind the counter at the facility's gift shop so employees in The Shoppe can directly assist patients unfamiliar with the concept.



JOHN KLICKER / THE OUTLOOK
Katie Erven, a sales associate with The Shoppe at Gresham Urgent Care, takes a receipt from the InstyMeds machine Monday, April 14.

"That was our decision, to provide a more personal touch," said sales associate Erin Coppedge of the machine's placement.

"We bought it because it is so convenient. What the machine does, it does in a very short time" compared to a busy pharmacy.

InstyMeds specializes in generic versions of acute medications used for pain and other immediate medical issues. The machines are loaded with cartridges of bottled, safety sealed medications of predetermined quantity. A patient enters a code from the doctor, his or her birth date and inserts a debit or credit card or cash to cover the cost. Prescriptions are priced between \$15-\$20, said Cindy Nelson, Inside Sales Development Specialist at the Eden Prairie, Minn.-based company.

"It's all about customer convenience," she said. "We're excited to have it in Oregon."

Safety and accuracy are inherent to the machine's operation, said Bob Bang, director of sales and marketing.

"It tracks inventory and everything is bar coded. We've dispensed over a half a million prescriptions without error," he said of the 100 or so machines installed in 15 states.

InstyMeds is the brainchild of Ken Rosenblum, who parlayed a frustrating night trying to fill a prescription for his five year old into a business concept. He worked with pharmacists, doctors and engineers for two years to develop the dispensing system.

What started with a pilot system in 2001 combines two iconic symbols of modern American life to the world of pharmacy. "It's a marriage of an ATM and a pop machine," Bang said.

Hospitals were the first InstyMeds market, he added. The machines help ease the workload in facilities with 24-hour pharmacies.

"It allows them to work on more complex cases," he said. "There are some cases the machine can't do, where you need the human touch."

"Anywhere you have a doctor prescribing acute medications is where we can be," he said. "You go right home with the medication you need."

Since Gresham Urgent Care got its machine in January, patients have marveled at the few minutes it typically takes for InstyMeds to dispense medication. They also benefit from a phone on the machine that provides a direct line to a pharmacist.

"They're amazed at how fast and efficient it is," said Coppedge. "They're happy they don't have to go wait at the pharmacy."

Aaron Liere, a physician's assistant at Gresham Urgent Care, said the cost of the medications and the convenience of InstyMeds adds a new dimension to the urgent care experience.

"When it's 9 at night, you're sick and you don't want to go anywhere else before going home, it fills that niche very well."