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RESTAURANT REVIEWS
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Medication system saves time, money

eMedPass passes test at health, rehab center

By Bill Wolfe
bwolfe@courier-journal.com
The Courier-Journal

A year ago, pill time at Oaklawn Health & Rehabilitation Center in eastern Jefferson County was a tedious chore.

Pushing a medicine cart from room to room, a nurse would wade through the sheaf of medical forms that spell out each patient's regimen, administer the drugs, log the transaction and repeat the procedure at the next room in a "medical pass" process that could take two to three hours.

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Today, things are different in one of the center's four wings, where Oaklawn has installed eMedPass, a computerized system from Louisville company Creative Strategies. "It makes the medicine pass go a lot faster," said nurse manager Shannon Davis.

The system, designed by company owner and President John Carroll, promises to cut

medicine distribution times, reduce the chance of error, automate record-keeping and notify nurses when it's time to reorder drugs.

"I believe it's the wave of the future," said Burke Stephens, administrator at Oaklawn, which agreed to begin testing the system last October and plans to use it soon throughout the building.

At present, eMedPass is being used by three pharmacies and five care facilities, said Carroll, a management and technology consultant. By Oct. 1, three more pharmacies and 15 facilities are in line to incorporate the system, which uses specialized software and a compact touch-screen computer that sits atop a medicine cart.

"We've got a number of other opportunities on the horizon," he said. "We'll be very busy for some time to come."

The company has 11 employees, including four hired this year. "Probably this time next year I'll at least be double -- somewhere between 20 and 30 employees," Carroll said.

Carroll developed eMedPass at the request of Louisville pharmacist David Wren, who owns PCA Pharmacy -- one of the institutional drug suppliers that serve nursing homes and other long-term-care facilities.

Wren complained that the facilities he served hadn't enjoyed the technological advances that other businesses take for granted, such as wireless networks and bar-code systems that track inventory.

"Much of the paperwork ... was pretty much the way it had been for years and years and years. There was not a lot of advancement, not a lot of technology,"



Creative Strategies President John Carroll designed eMedPass, a computerized system that promises to cut medicine distribution times, reduce the chance of error, automate record-keeping and notify nurses when it's time to reorder drugs. (Photos by Pam Spaulding, The Courier-Journal)

CREATIVE STRATEGIES

- **Owner:** John Carroll
- **Address:** 2400 Envoy Circle
- **Phone:** 491-2900
- **Online:** www.creativestrategiesus.com



Nurse manager Shannon Davis demonstrated how she uses the eMedPass technology. The system is being used by three pharmacies and five care facilities.

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he said.

Carroll had provided consulting for institutional pharmacies before getting Wren's call for help. He also knew the ins and outs of electronic transaction systems through previous positions with gift-card supplier Stored Value Systems and National City Processing, where he developed a smart-card system to handle food stamps and cash benefits for several states.

When he looked at how pharmacies and nursing homes interact, Carroll said, he saw how transactions could be simplified and improved with the right software and hardware.

"There's a constant communication issue between the pharmacist and the facility," he said. Record-keeping was slow and labor-intensive, depending on handwritten notes. Just printing the paper forms to fill out in the nursing home was a big expense. "In one particular instance in a pharmacy, they were spending over \$60,000 on paper to send out to their facility" each year.

Carroll produced "a very, very nice program, that took it way beyond what we envisioned in the first place," Wren said. "It's turned out to be a really very well-accepted product."

Among eMedPass' selling points:

Computer screens display icons of drugs given to each patient without the cluttered notations and varied handwriting styles that can cause confusion in written charts.

Optional photo identification of patients on their medication records ensure that each person is matched with the right file.

Bar-code scanning identifies each medication before it's given as a safeguard against mix-ups.

Locks on the cart are keyed to the fingerprints of authorized users, guarding against drug theft.

Doctors' orders and medication reports can be generated easily.

The system helps nurses reduce or eliminate errors, Carroll said, and lets them spend "more time with the residents in quality-of-care issues, rather than doing documentation."

It also simplifies end-of-the month record-keeping, when drug-administration instructions have to be copied by hand onto a new set of forms for the coming weeks -- a task that can take 60 hours if done manually. With eMedPass, the updates are automatic.

Providence Place Retirement Community in Chambersburg, Pa., began using eMedPass about three months ago, and "we're very pleased with it," said administrator Rodney Stoops. "The chance for medication errors to me is like zero with this ... and it is extremely easy to use."

"There are four facilities of Providence Place in Pennsylvania, and we're the first to use it," Stoops said. "We'll be in the next year probably installing it in the other three."

Pharmacies typically pay for the computers and license fees, recouping the expense by reducing their paper costs, Carroll said.

Nursing homes or other institutions may face some expense installing a computer server and network, but they also are likely to save on expenses, he said.

The system saves from five to 10 seconds per medication, and in long-term care, patients take from 15 to 20 medicines. Multiply that by 100 or more patients, and "there's substantial time savings," Carroll said.

The system has graduated from its testing phase, but it will continue to get tweaks and improvements, he said. "We're out there looking to stay ahead of the game."

Reporter Bill Wolfe can be reached at (502) 582-4248.

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