

E-Renewals Will Give Pharmacists More Control

By Ken Whittemore, R.Ph.

E-prescribing. The very word can suggest that someone—physicians—are in control. They do the prescribing. Pharmacists do the dispensing. Historically, e- or electronic prescribing has been a process that began as an electronic message containing a new prescription on the physician side, but was converted into a paper prescription handed to the patient or a fax on the pharmacy side.

So, while this process virtually eliminated one of the clear deficiencies—and sometimes dangers of the prescribing process (the often illegible handwriting of doctors)—it did not deliver all of the safety enhancements or streamline the work flow on the pharmacy side. In particular, it did not address the burden of all of the phone calls and faxes related to prescription refill renewals that pharmacists and physicians exchange. In other words, it did not in any way reduce the time spent playing telephone or fax tag with medical practices. What was needed was an effective, neutral network that seamlessly connected physicians and pharmacists for the purpose of bidirectional prescription information transmission that was focused on improving efficiency and safety.

Pharmacists Association (NCPA) established a company, SureScripts, to create a neutral, secure network that would enable the two-way exchange of prescription data between pharmacists and physicians, all to improve the overall prescribing process.

SureScripts initiated a state-by-state program to make pharmacy regulations favorable for electronic prescribing. Today, only two states—South Carolina and Georgia—have serious impediments to electronic prescribing in their pharmacy laws and regulations.

Renewal Advantage For Pharmacists

The SureScripts network is neutral, and therefore does not favor any particular company's software application, whether on the physician's or the pharmacist's side. SureScripts does not develop, sell, or endorse specific electronic prescribing software. Instead, the company works with physician and pharmacy software companies that want to connect to the SureScripts network and takes them through a comprehensive certification process that, first, ensures a seamless technological interface, and second, commits the vendors to business rules that safeguard the fairness of the prescribing process by prohibiting inappropriate messaging at the point of care.

This protects the physician's choice of therapy and the patient's choice of pharmacy.

Even more critical for pharmacy is the opportunity to share the driver's seat with the physician practice. Because, unlike e-prescribing of the past, which was primarily a one-way communication from

the physician to the pharmacy fax machine, the SureScripts network provides two-way true electronic connectivity between the pharmacy management system and the physician's prescribing application. This connectivity allows

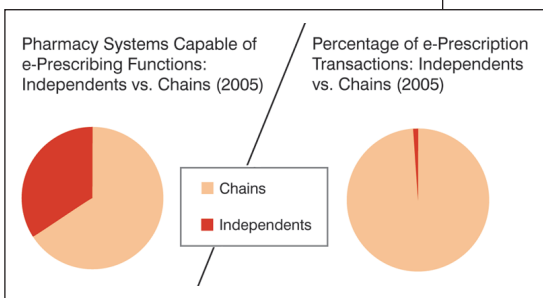
pharmacists to initiate communications by sending prescribers requests for renewal authorizations electronically, and to receive their response and new prescriptions directly into their pharmacy software.

By initiating renewal electronically, pharmacists gain substantial control in the process. This control translates into drastic reductions in the number of physician faxes and phone calls exchanged, and anecdotal evidence suggests a substantial reduction in the time spent to turn one of these requests around. Significant savings in labor and time are other outcomes (see the April 2005 issue of *America's Pharmacist*).

Today, more than 85 percent of America's community pharmacies have software that is certified to connect to the SureScripts electronic prescribing network, and more than half of the pharmacies using these software systems already are active. Additionally, more than 150,000 physicians are being enabled to connect to these pharmacies through the more than 40 e-prescribing applications certified (or in process) to connect to the SureScripts network.

We still have a ways to go—especially in getting the independent pharmacists to embrace this valuable technology and come on board in larger numbers. Nevertheless, we've traveled a long distance in just a few short years, which just goes to show that when you put pharmacy in charge, things happen. □

Ken Whittemore, R.Ph., MBA, is vice president of professional and regulatory affairs at SureScripts. For questions about electronic prescribing and how you can ensure that your pharmacy is taking advantage of this technology, please contact the SureScripts Electronic Prescribing Resource Center at 866-RxReady, by e-mail at info@surescripts.com, or visit the SureScripts Web site at www.surescripts.com for more information.



NCPA, NACDS Create Electronic Prescribing Network

In 2001, the country's two major associations for community pharmacy, the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) and the National Community