



Tech Talk

Experts extol technology's virtues

By Chris Linville

It would be foolish to claim that independent pharmacists are not facing their share of challenges in 2006. From Medicare Part D to the future of Medicaid, to the ongoing battle to level the playing field with pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs), independent pharmacies are dealing with more than enough complexities.

At the same time, independents do have options. New pharmacy technologies can be a prominent ally in making pharmacists' businesses more efficient and productive, by giving them more time to do what they do best: patient care.

What was groundbreaking 30 years ago might seem quaint (if not obsolete) today. And what is considered state of the art now may be passé a few short months from now. At NCPA's 107th Annual Convention and Trade Exposition in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, the association held its 6th annual Technology Seminar, an all-day event that highlighted how technology can be useful in many pharmacy applications. Sponsored by AutoMed, Innovation Associates, McKesson Pharmacy Systems, NDCHealth (now Per-Sé Technologies), Parata Systems and ScriptPro, this seminar brought in a variety of experts to discuss and demonstrate why they have embraced technology and how they have integrated it into their pharmacy businesses.

Among those featured at the event was Bill Lockwood, publisher of *ComputerTalk* and a close observer of technology trends. Lockwood, who is also a regular contributor to *America's Pharmacist*, has played a key role in helping the technology seminar become a signature of the annual convention. He says the event continues to evolve in a positive direction.

"One observation I have, from being involved as a panel moderator over the past few years, is that since we changed the format to a free-flowing panel discussion this has not only provided more insights into the various topics, but lends itself to audience participation," he says, adding, "What's nice about getting the audience involved is that it brings the discussion down to

their specific interests. We also find the audience contributing to the discussion with their experiences."

The technology seminar focused on a number of areas, including workflow, automation, electronic prescribing, durable medical equipment (DME) billing, and long-term care workflow. Also, Lockwood was asked to give his thoughts on emerging pharmacy technology issues by moderator Bill Osborn, RPh, vice chairman of NCPA's Technology Committee.

Workflow: What Works and What Doesn't

The workflow panel featured discussion about what works and what doesn't, and how maximizing workflow can lead to greater productivity. This session, moderated by Lockwood, was sponsored by McKesson Pharmacy Systems and ScriptPro. Panelists were Tim Davis, RPh, from Brighton Pharmacy in New Brighton, Pennsylvania; Jack Loveland, RPh, from Beacon Prescriptions in New Britain, Connecticut; and Bruce Wiswell, RPh, director of Pharmacy Technology and Operations Support with Rite Aid Corp.

The panelists discussed many areas of pharmacy workflow, including what to do when a system component goes down, what their workstation configurations look like, and how they deploy technicians, clerks and pharmacists in the workflow process.

Automation: When Are You Ready?

Automation is always a hot topic in independent pharmacy, and as with the other sessions, it was well represented by leaders in the field. Moderated by Osborn, the session was supported by AutoMed, Innovation Associates, McKesson APS, Parata Systems and ScriptPro. The panelists were David Debysingh, RPh, from McCoy's Pharmacy, Cottage Grove, Oregon; Robert Fischer, RPh, from Ontario Clinic Pharmacy in Ontario, Oregon; Bethany Miller, RPh, from Lion Pharmacy in Red Lion, Pennsylvania; Jay

Phipps, RPh, from Phipps Pharmacy in McKenzie, Tennessee; and Steve Nelson, RPh, from Okeechobee Drug in Okeechobee, Florida.

Nelson says that he “found the seminar to be extremely enlightening and walked away with a few new ideas to apply in my pharmacy practice from the other panel members.”

He also said that he was encouraged by the response to the panelist’s stories and suggestions.

“It was gratifying to learn that many members of the audience will apply our experience and expertise to their practice and have the ability to compete with the chains with their new use of technology.”

E-Prescribing: The Future Is Now

For electronic prescribing (or e-prescribing), the future is now, or it should be, in the opinion of its proponents. Among them is Kevin Hutchinson, CEO of SureScripts.

“Going into the NCPA convention, we knew there would be a lot of buzz around electronic prescribing—and we were not disappointed,” Hutchinson says. “Unfortunately, that buzz belied a sobering statistic: one percent of electronic prescribing transactions are generated by independent pharmacists.”

Hutchinson says that educating independent pharmacists on e-prescribing’s value was a key priority.

“We wanted to get beyond the headlines, so we shared hard data on how e-prescribing reduces the total labor costs associated with dispensing and saves time,” he says. “Perhaps most importantly, we highlighted how physicians find it easier to communicate with pharmacies that can send them refill requests electronically, providing e-prescribing enabled pharmacies with a competitive advantage.”

Hutchinson says his goal is to see momentum build for e-prescribing.

“I hope to look back on the 2005 NCPA convention as a major turning point, when community pharmacists came together and decided they were going to commit to electronic prescribing.”

The e-prescribing session also featured Tammy Lewis, SureScripts’ chief marketing officer; Michael Rupp, executive director, Center for the Advancement of Pharmacy Practice at Midwestern University in Glendale, Arizona; and Michael Kriemelman, eRx business unit manager for Allscripts.

DME Billing: A Pharmacist Panel

In the durable medical equipment (DME) panel, the focus was on billing options, among them integrated and stand alone. Joe Lech, RPh, from Lech’s Pharmacy in Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania, moderated the session, which featured panelists C.A. Kuykendall, RPh, from Village Pharmacy in Ozark, Arkansas, and Hugh Chancy, RPh, from Chancy Drugs in Hahira, Georgia.

The panelists discussed their individual pharmacies’ scope of DME services, logistics and size. They also considered how the DME billing process has impacted their workflow and how the billing process has improved patient loyalty.

LTC: Long-Term Opportunities

Long-term care (LTC) is obviously a relevant topic for pharmacists, and a panel of experts shared their views on workflow within LTC. Options such as document imaging, and bar code scanning, to name a few, were discussed.

“I was glad to see NCPA include LTC in the technology seminar,” says moderator Jim Spoon, RPh, from QualityCare Pharma-

cy in Tulsa Oklahoma. “Our members have a lot of opportunity in LTC and are eager to use available technology to make this segment feasible for their pharmacy.”

Rhonda Eldridge, RPh, of Grandview Pharmacy in Connersville, Indiana, and Alexander Pytlarz, RPh, from Vanguard Advanced Pharmacy Systems in Bradenton, Florida, were panelists.

Pytlarz had several observations, saying, “Discussion on DME billing or pharmacy software systems is just the beginning of what owners and operators can do succeed in providing quality services to the LTC market. The value resides in the information that peers share with their colleagues about the success and failures of growing a profitable pharmacy business. There is no better way to confidently make a decision on technology than to get the feedback of those already mastering those products. The opportunity to excel is open.”

Along with the panel discussions, there was a tour of the newly redesigned Pharmacist e-Link™. Incorporating a new four column design, improved site architecture, and a complete overhaul of the server backbone supporting e-Link, it now has a greatly enhanced capacity to serve the needs of independent pharmacists and continue to diversify the business opportunities, content and resources offered to its nearly 40,000 subscribers.

Created in May 2003, Pharmacist e-Link is an extensive online source for business and legislative action tools; more than 100 free continuing education programs; current news and information; and drug, disease and technology resources, to name several. (To access Pharmacist e-Link, go to NCPA’s Web Site at www.ncpanet.org.)

The audience was also treated to a keynote presentation by Bill Felkey, professor of Pharmacy Care Systems at the Auburn University School of Pharmacy. Felkey, an unabashed technology enthusiast, is eager to help pharmacists take full advantage of all the technological innovations available to pharmacists. Felkey says, “Most individuals get about 10 percent of the tech capability that they use. So if you have a computer or PDA, you are only getting about 10 percent out of it.” (A more detailed look at Felkey’s observations about technology can be found in the January 2006 *America’s Pharmacist*.)

Lockwood says that with technology’s importance, it’s critical that the seminar provide a comprehensive presentation of what’s available, along with creative individuals who are making technology work for them.

“As a member of the planning committee I can say that a great deal of thought goes into the selection of topics to be included and the people to serve on the panels,” he says. “It’s definitely not a casual effort and the results reflect this.” ■

Chris Linville is managing editor of America’s Pharmacist.

NCPA Thanks Supporters of 2005 Technology Seminar

NCPA would like to express its gratitude to the following sponsors whose generous support helped make the 2005 Technology Seminar a success.

- AutoMed
- Innovation Associates
- McKesson Pharmacy Systems
- NDCHealth (now Per-Sé Technologies)
- Parata Systems
- ScriptPro