

"KL60 Is Like Having Another Technician"

Dennis Pharmacy, Key West, FL

Summary

In Key West, FL, Dennis Pharmacy fills prescriptions for a large HIV community as well as the general population. David Alea (former owner and now consultant) and his daughter Colette Alea-Barroso (current owner) insist that staff members give patients as much time as needed. When daily volume kept escalating and the staff pharmacists were feeling the strain, Mr. Alea saw automation as the next logical step. The KL60 now handles about 35% of total orders – essentially doing the work of an extra technician – and leaves the staff to do what they do best: counsel their patients.



Setting

The Alea family represents three generations of pharmacists. Mr. Alea bought the original Dennis Pharmacy in 1972 in the tourist area of Key West (that store's lunch counter was immortalized by the Jimmy Buffet song "Cheeseburger In Paradise"). He opened a second Dennis Pharmacy in a medical building with 18 physician offices. He merged the stores to the medical building location after Hurricane Wilma's devastation in 2005. Business is almost exclusively prescription dispensing (very few front-end products offered).

- Daily Rx volume: peaks up to 400+
- Pharmacy size: Less than 1,000 square feet
- Staff: 8 total staff members; typical shift is 2 R.Ph, 1-2 techs and 1 clerk

Challenges

Prescription volume escalated since the two pharmacies were merged in 2005. This was a mixed blessing, especially given the clientele's need for in-depth HIV medication counseling and overall patient care. Says Mr. Alea, "As we grew to 250-script days, it was more hectic than we wanted. We could feel the tension." When he analyzed his prescribing trends, he saw a robotic dispenser as logical – it could free up the staff. The problem was that all robots were overkill for his needs. "We would have had to remodel," says Mr. Alea. "And we only wanted to automate 60 to 70 medications."

Solution

When Mr. Alea viewed an advertisement about the KL60 he was intrigued by the device's small size, the number of medications automated, and the low cost. "I had been using a Kirby tablet counter for years, so I knew the company." Mr. Alea simply removed half a bay of shelving and had the KL60 wheeled right in. The Transaction Data Rx30 interface was simple. After tweaking the software, the pharmacy staff was proficient within a week. The KL60 handles about 35% of Dennis Pharmacy's daily orders. For pharmacies considering robotics, Mr. Alea offers this advice: "A robot isn't plug-and-go. Be patient, work closely with the automation provider, and expect to be an active participant. You get what you put into it."

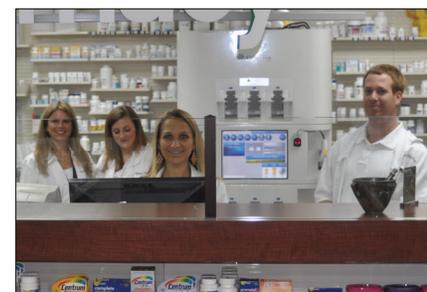
Results

- Handles One-Third of Prescriptions:** "It is almost the perfect level of automation for us," says Mr. Alea. "Anything more would be too much."
- Lower Stress Levels:** As the KL60 churns, "things seem more cleaned up at the end of day" and there are fewer outlying scripts to handle.
- Redeploy Staff:** Mr. Alea says his KL60 is equal to three-quarters to a full tech. "I probably could have cut a part-timer, but I chose to move people around to other duties. And I can have someone come in later or leave earlier with no negative impact. You can really feel the benefit of having the KL60 on days when you're short-handed."
- Simple Maintenance:** A staff member reviews the KL60 every a.m. for about 15 minutes to replenish cassettes and vials and clean.



"For five years, I was waiting for a pharmacy automation company to design a device that handles about 60 or 70 fast movers. The KL60 was almost exactly my ideal quantity."

David Alea, R.Ph. (right, with Collette Alea-Barroso, Pharm.D.)



Dennis Pharmacy Staff