

Fill 'er up Chessie

State's third robotic pharmacist works in Calvert

By Andrea Bassoff
Recorder Staff Reporter

The next prescription customers take to Chesapeake Care Drug in Chesapeake Beach will be filled by a robot. Chessie, a ScriptPro SP 200 Dispensing System, fills 100 prescriptions per hour. That's fast.

And human pharmacists like Leo Mallard are no rival for her.

"I can't compete with Chessie," Mallard said. "I can only fill about 25 prescriptions an hour."

All of the pharmacy technicians at Chesapeake Care Drug have been certified, but they still can't match Chessie's speed and accuracy.

"She out fills any pharmacist or technician," said Manager Beverly Dillon. "and she's 99.7 percent accurate. The three tenths of a percent is just a counting error margin. Occasionally she will miscount by one and fill 30-day supply with 31 pills."

Dillon said the pharmacy hired Chessie, the third such robot in the state and the second in Southern Maryland, due to a nationwide pharmacist shortage and to improve efficiency and accuracy.

"The system will increase efficiency and allow pharmacists and



Pharmacy technician/manager Beverly Dillon scans a prescription for Chessie, a robotic dispensing system, that fills prescriptions for customers of Chesapeake Care Drug in Chesapeake Beach.

technicians more time to spend counseling customers, practicing clinical pharmacy."

Manufactured in Mission, Kan., by ScriptPro, the SP 200 performs the time consuming and tedious tasks of counting pills, filling vials and labeling prescriptions. The bar code for a particular prescription is scanned on a computer by a technician. A robotic arm picks the proper medication from several dispensing cells loaded with most frequently used medications.

Then it fills the correct size vial for the amount of medicine needed. A conveyor belt moves the prescription vials from the SP 200 to the verification station where pharmacy personnel make certain the drug dispensed is the drug prescribed. Pharmacists make the final check for accuracy, comparing the

pills in the vial with a computer screen image of the drug.

Another SP 200 in Maryland, named Floyd, because the store got him during the hurricane, works out of St. Mary's County at Tidewater Pharmacy in Mechanicsville. And more of Chessie and Floyd's ilk may be cropping up in neighborhood pharmacies in years to come.

The \$180,000 system, which Chesapeake Drug leases, took three years to develop and a year to test. And it does save them time and money, Dillon said. Customers only wait about 10 minutes for a prescription. But Chessie is not intended to replace staff, just to make their jobs easier.

"We're setting our standards a little higher than the larger chain drugstores," Dillon said. "With systems like Chessie and Floyd helping out, and the state of Maryland pushing for legislation to require that all pharmacy technicians be certified, we hope to provide our customers with the best service possible."



Chessie, the robotic pharmacist, labels, counts and fills prescriptions rolling off a conveyer belt for inspection by pharmacists. The new SP 200 Dispensing System fills 100 prescriptions per hour.

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