

Aurora improves patient outcomes

ELM GROVE, Wis. — Aurora Pharmacy operates more than 120 retail pharmacies as free-standing drug stores and in supermarkets, clinics and hospitals throughout Wisconsin. As a division of Aurora Health Care, a not-for-profit Wisconsin health care provider and a nationally recognized leader in efforts to improve health care quality, it works closely with the many other health care service providers in the Aurora family.

"We are always looking for ways to improve service for our customers," comments John Gates, Aurora's director of retail pharmacy. "Our commitment to health management goes beyond dispensing medications. We are constantly looking for new ways to allow our pharmacists to spend more time doing one-on-one counseling with patients."

Aurora Health Care has earned a reputation as an early adopter of new technologies and treatment options that improve patient outcomes and lower costs. Its goal is a future where health care delivery is more efficient and more effective, says a company spokesman. These values and objectives are reflected throughout the organization, including at Aurora Pharmacy.

One example of that commitment is the chain's use of pharmacy automation. By deploying automated dispensing systems matched to individual pharmacies' size and prescription volume, Aurora has been able to reduce filling costs and lower staffing costs while en-

hancing the patient experience.

"Our corporate culture reinforces the concept that our processes should result in better patient outcomes and better profits for the company," Gates remarks. "Automated dispensing allows us more opportunities for patient contact at the store level. It has reduced response time to our patients and increased our productivity, allowing us additional time and opportunity to provide customer service."

Aurora uses two models of ScriptPro LLC robotic dispensing systems in its pharmacies. Some smaller locations use the ScriptPro SP 100, while larger locations rely on the SP 200 model.

Robots fill many scripts.

Reporting tools in the systems provide insight into the pharmacy operation and allow objective evaluation of the best use of staff time, which drugs should be added to the system, and peak filling days and times.

"The reporting tools were crucial in the decision to get ScriptPro automation," notes Kimberly Hodgkinson, director of finance at Aurora Pharmacy. "The summary report shows us the fill rates, who enters data, and who fills prescriptions and verifies. It also helps us determine which drugs should be in the system to maximize utilization."

The robots now fill between

40% and 60% of prescriptions at most Aurora pharmacies and have resulted in improvements in patient safety, inventory management, recruitment efforts and the work environment. "We anticipated staff burnout if the pace had continued without help from technology," Gates says. "We view our robots as an investment in the future of the pharmacy."

In November Aurora tapped a much older technology to help make life a little easier for its customers. It introduced a state-wide toll-free telephone number that customers can use to find information about home delivery, store locations and more. "This is a quick, convenient way for people to get information 24 hours a day," Gates points out. "It's perfect for people who may not have access to the Web."

Most of Aurora's pharmacies — about 65 — are freestanding locations, with about 45 located in clinics and hospitals that are part of the Aurora Health Care network. The chain also operates pharmacies in about 20 supermarkets, primarily Pick 'n Save stores and Copps Food Centers.

Aurora Pharmacy played an important role in helping to meet the health care needs of about 400 Gulf Coast residents who were evacuated to Milwaukee in the wake of Hurricane Katrina last year. The evacuees were housed in facilities at the State Fairgrounds, where a health care clinic was set up.

"When the clinic was first set up we needed a pharmacy to fill

AURORA PHARMACY

• **TOP EXECUTIVE**
James Moore, president

• **HEADQUARTERS**

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• **INDUSTRY RANK** — 25 in sales, 15 in stores

• Full-year results

Sales — \$275.2 million*

Net earnings — N/A

Net margin — N/A

- Number of drug stores — 128
- Number of states operating — 1
- Number of stores opened or acquired in 2005 — 3
- Number of stores closed or sold in 2005 — 15
- Average sales per store — \$2.16 million*
- Average store size — 2,000 sq. ft. (freestanding stores); 1,500 sq. ft. (clinic pharmacies); 1,300 sq. ft. (supermarket pharmacies)
- Distribution — Outside distributor

*CDR estimate.
N/A=Not available.

prescriptions," relates Bill Bazan, metropolitan Milwaukee vice president of the Wisconsin Hospitals Association. "Aurora Pharmacy stepped to the plate on Day 1 and began honoring the prescriptions from the clinic, waiving the co-pay. No one was turned away."

Ed Howe, president and chief executive officer of Aurora Health Care, downplays the chain's response. "It was the

right thing to do. We are talking about life-saving medications for people at a time of their greatest need," notes Howe, who plans to retire this year once an executive search committee finds his replacement.

Most recently, Aurora has expanded its pharmacy operation with the acquisition of three community pharmacies from Snyder's Drug Stores. The three stores were the only outlets Snyder's had in the state of Wisconsin, which made it challenging to operate them competitively.

"Our desire was to find a buyer that focused on the individual needs of a community while also bringing the larger resources that are so essential in today's competitive pharmacy environment," stated Dave Schwartz, Snyder's president, in announcing the sale in February of this year. "Aurora is a good fit for this purchase because their philosophy on community pharmacy care fits closely with our approach."

Two of the stores, in Twin Lakes and Paddock Lake, are being remodeled to fit the Aurora Pharmacy brand and wellness approach. The third, located in Merrill, is being consolidated with the Aurora Pharmacy that currently operates in that community, to enable residents to receive cost-effective and efficient pharmacy services, Gates reports.

"Aurora Pharmacy looks forward to bringing our approach to pharmacy services to these communities," he says. "As a part of a larger health system, pharmacists play a key role in Aurora's continuum-of-care approach, helping to counsel patients and working closely with Aurora physicians."