

Auto-Print PCM Packaging System from Medical Packaging Inc.

FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS, THE PHARMACY DEPARTMENT at Good Samaritan Hospital, a 230-bed county hospital in Vincennes, Indiana, has used Medical Packaging Inc.'s Auto-Print PCM (Punch-Cut-Machine) Packaging System to prepare bar coded, unit dose packages for our McKesson ROBOT-Rx. The Auto-Print PCM functions like most tabletop unit dose packaging machines, but provides an added benefit: It punches a hole in each unit dose package, allowing for easy storage of the packages in robotic dispensing systems.

The Search for a Cost-Effective Packaging Solution

Prior to installing the Auto-Print PCM, we had been using an over-bagger to produce robot-compatible, unit dose packages. But like many pharmacies, we wanted to reduce the costs associated with our repackaging operations. As such, our decision to implement the Auto-Print PCM was prompted primarily by economics. We considered several options in our search for a more cost-effective packaging solution, including PakPlus-Rx (McKesson's on-site, staffed packaging service) and McKesson's machine for preparing robot-compatible packages. We also considered purchasing robot-compatible unit dose packages directly from our wholesaler. However, we found the Auto-Print PCM to be the most financially viable option for our operation. Instead of leasing equipment from McKesson, within two or three months, we could pay for the Auto-Print PCM outright. And after performing a cost analysis, we found we could save several thousand dollars a year in materials costs alone by eliminating the plastic bags required by our over-bagger and by purchasing drugs in bulk rather than in unit dose.

Of course, we also had concerns with regards to staff hours and labor costs. In our initial analysis, we estimated we would need one full-time technician, Monday through Friday, to package drugs with the Auto-Print PCM. However, we were pleasantly surprised to learn it takes only half that time to package enough drugs to keep our robot fully stocked. In analyzing our return on investment, we found that the machine has more than paid for itself.

In terms of our workflow efficiency, the Auto-Print PCM has sped up our packaging process quite a bit; it can package up to 30 doses per minute. In addition, because it is much quieter than the over-bagger, our technicians appreciate the improved working environment.

The Packager in Action

We have stringent packaging policies and procedures. Although there is no such thing as a "quiet" place in the pharmacy, we keep the Auto-Print PCM in the back of the facility, where the packaging technician has fewer distractions. Of course, we do not allow any food or drink in the packaging area, and only one staff member is permitted in the area at a time. One technician packages the drugs, and a pharmacist verifies the packages.

The Auto-Print PCM is connected to a nearby PC and outfitted with MPI's WinPak bar coding software. To begin the packaging process, the technician scans a bulk bottle's bar code. The software then generates the information needed for each unit dose package, including the drug name, dose, NDC number, expiration



date, and a linear bar code. The packaging technician runs off one empty package for the pharmacist to verify. Should a particular drug's NDC number not be in the WinPak database, the technician manually enters the drug's information on the PC and the pharmacist verifies it. Verification is crucial; we know that if we get it wrong the first time, it will also be wrong the next time and into the foreseeable future. Once the information is verified, we begin the packaging process by feeding the capsules or tablets into the machine. Completed packages are stored in carefully labeled boxes or used to directly

stock the robot or the offline inventory area.

Overall, the machine is very dependable and easy to use, and we have been pleased with its results. The only convenience we give up by not using a McKesson packager is an interface between the Auto-Print PCM and ROBOT-Rx databases. Thus, for new line items, we have to manually enter the drug information into both machines.



Maintenance

We have purposely trained only four technicians to use the Auto-Print PCM, because we want to make sure the packager is properly taken care of by people who know how to use and maintain it. That said, it is a very durable machine and we have had few maintenance issues with it. The minor issues we encountered were simple to diagnose and fix ourselves or with minimal help from the manufacturer. In addition, Good Samaritan was one of the first users of the Auto-Print PCM, and we found MPI to be very receptive to our suggestions for alterations to the machine.

Robot users know how important it is to keep the device well stocked with each line item. The Auto-Print PCM, in addition to being cost-effective and easy to use, aids us in keeping our ROBOT-Rx's online and offline stock at optimum levels, thereby maximizing the benefits we reap from the robot technology. ■

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WHERE TO FIND IT:

Medical Packaging Inc. **Circle reader service number 42**
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