



People-focused pharmacy logistics

A robot has entered the pharmacy scene. Since October 2010, a nimble robot has been working in the Rhein-Apotheke in Höchst (Vorarlberg). It is a component of a highly modern logistics system. For the pharmacy and its customers, this modern technology has two major advantages: it optimises the warehouse and above all, the pharmacy's employees have more time for customers.

For the head of the Rhein-Apotheke, Jürgen Rehak, the conversion of the pharmacy and the implementation of the new robot system represent the realisation of a long-standing dream. For him and his employees, a new age of pharmacies has begun.

In the past, medicines were pulled out of one of the many drawers. Withdrawal and retrieval times were relatively long. Now the desired medicine is automatically delivered directly to the respective customer at the sales counter. In the Rhein-Apotheke, medicines are no longer stored in the classic drawers but in an automatic consignment device behind the sales areas.

The automatic consignment device represents an innovative warehousing technology for medicines. Medicines are automatically scanned for storage, placed on a conveyor belt and electronically measured. The calculator then assigns them to the optimal warehouse location using a so-called "chaotic" system. The packages are ordered not in alphabetical order but by their size and expiry date (FIFO principle) and sorted and put away by a robot arm.

All entries and control systems are managed from a display screen:

If a customer at the sales desk desires a medicine, the article is entered in the pharmacy computer, the robot arm fetches the package from the shelf system and within a few seconds, the desired medicine is available in the sales area. The automatic consignment device knows precisely which package it has stored and when. In this way, the monitoring of the expiry dates is automated and optimised (FIFO principle). Through collaboration between the automatic consignment device and the ERP system, medicines are also ordered automatically and efficiently.

Before the starting signal could be given for this major investment, Jürgen Rehak had looked at similar robots across the whole of Austria. Indeed, to date there are only some 60 such automated systems in use within pharmacies in the whole of Austria. In this way, handling with "drawers" at the Rhein-Apotheke in Höchst is no longer "in". The desired medicine is delivered from the robot-controlled goods store, via conveyor belts to the respective sales and consultation areas. With a stock of over 35,000 medicines, this investment was desirable and necessary from the perspective of the pharmacy's advisory service. The employees of the Rhein-Apotheke in Höchst save time and effort by being able to concentrate on competent and intensive advice and sales.

Seen through logistics spectacles: "People-focused pharmacy logistics"

Yours
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