

## Peer Perspectives on Electronic Prescribing:

# Connecting with pharmacies in the neighborhood — and nationwide



### SITUATION

Dr. Elisa Montross-Lopez and her colleagues like the “personal touch,” so historically, the practice routinely phoned in all new and refill prescriptions to local pharmacies, to save their patients a trip to the pharmacy to drop off a paper prescription. As the practice grew, this courtesy — while greatly appreciated by the patients— created a huge burden on the staff, who would routinely waste time and lose productivity working their way through menu-driven pharmacy systems, being put on hold, waiting for pharmacy callbacks, and sorting out misunderstandings and prescription errors that resulted from verbal communications.

### IMPLEMENTATION

When Dr. Lopez and her associates were invited to participate in a state-run program that would underwrite the cost of an electronic prescribing system, they were intrigued by the possibilities. The program, offered by the Medical Society of Delaware, provided each of the prescribers with personal digital assistants (PDAs) equipped with DrFirst Rcopia, an electronic prescribing application that is certified to electronically connect the vast majority of U.S. community pharmacies through the Pharmacy Health Information Exchange™, a secure network operated by SureScripts®.

*“...we’re no longer at the whim of numerous phone interruptions throughout the course of the day,”*

*— Dr. Lopez*

The program also provided the initial training and follow-up troubleshooting that was needed to implement e-prescribing into their day-to-day operations. Several desktop computers at the practice were also equipped with DrFirst Rcopia. “After just three hours of training, we pretty much started using the system that same day,” says Dr. Lopez.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**Elisa Montross-Lopez, M.D.**

- In practice for 10 years (Lewes, DE)
- Practice Size: 8 total employees: 3 physicians, 3 nurses, 2 staff
- Technology Provider & Solution: DrFirst Rcopia
- Avg. Daily Rx Volume: 100 New Rx/doctor, 40 Refills/doctor
- Rx Time Savings: Clarification requests from pharmacies reduced from 10/day to virtually zero.
- Time spent on-hold and managing fax requests from pharmacies for prescription refills was significantly reduced.

The overall implementation and training was made simpler when Dr. Lopez’s practice supplied the software vendor with complete patient information from the Billing Department, so that Rcopia could populate the system with actual patient and medication data from the practice prior to going live.

“The ability to practice with the system, and experiment with the drug-interaction and formulary-checking capabilities, using real information on our actual patients helped it to hit home so much better — it wasn’t hypothetical,” says Dr. Lopez.

## RESULTS

Today, with the ability to respond to requests for prescription refills, and produce and transmit new prescriptions from their PDAs, Dr. Lopez and her colleagues are still able to save the patients that first trip to the pharmacy, but now, she says, they have also been able to dramatically improve safety “because all information is accurately conveyed from our computers to the computers at the pharmacies.”

The new-found automation has been very rewarding for all in the practice. “Before, one nurse used to spend every afternoon phoning pharmacies to call in new and refill prescriptions, and she’d waste time being stuck on hold, waiting for pharmacists to call back, spelling out patient and medication names, and writing out complete notes in all the patients’ files,” says Dr. Lopez. Now, the prescribers have the freedom to review and authorize electronic refill requests throughout the course of the day, whenever they have time, so the old backlog never materializes.

And, because the prescribers and the pharmacists regularly communicate with one another via the computer, “we’re not interrupting each other all day long and missing each others’ calls, and we’re no longer at the whim of numerous phone interruptions throughout the course of the day,” says Dr. Lopez.

Meanwhile, the precision of the electronic process, and computer-to-computer connectivity between prescribers and pharmacists, bring distinct safety improvements. “Many drug names look and sound the same, so if you miss an ‘e’ or an ‘a’ you change the entire prescription,” adds Karla Williams, R.N. “The system is very precise so when you start typing, it pulls up the medication options, eliminating the possibility of spelling-related errors.”

“The system provides immediate access to drug and dosing information, and the software is constantly updated to reflect new drug information — information that is not even in the standard reference books yet,” adds Williams.

## BEST PRACTICES

- **Pre-populate the database prior to implementation.** When Rcopia offered to upload the complete patient and medication data for the practice ahead of time, “it helped the training and implementation to go more quickly and be more meaningful,” says Dr. Lopez.
- **Get started and reap the rewards.** Because the team regularly shares shortcuts and tips discovered by trial-and-error experimentation, even the most computer-phobic practitioners in the office were soon won over. Says Dr. Lopez: “It would be extremely hard to go back to the old ways of handling prescriptions.”

The fact that the e-prescribing system is connected to a nationwide network of community pharmacies also pleases both Dr. Lopez and her patients. “Many of my patients spend extended time in Florida and other locations, and now, using the system, I can easily submit their prescription refills to their local pharmacies out of state,” says Dr. Lopez. “My patients love this, and it saves our office from having to make long-distance phone calls.”

## THE BOTTOM LINE

“Not only are we working fewer hours, but we’re all less rushed now during the day,” says Dr. Lopez. “This allows for more satisfying patient contact, and, is saving us money, because we’re no longer paying overtime to manage the labor-intensive refill process.”