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Pharmacy Robot

A new team member is helping to revolutionise the way the Royal United Hospital runs the dispensing of medicines.

The RUH has successfully installed a state-of-the-art robot to help dispense drugs in the hospital's busy pharmacy.

The robot selects the required drugs at a speed of one item every six to 12 seconds from its own internal shelves using advanced computer technology. Pharmacy staff still order the medication and generate the labels from their computers, but drugs are picked and placed in a spiral chute by the robot, arriving at the dispenser's workstation in a matter of seconds.

Sue Manktelow, Deputy Chief Pharmacist for the RUH said: "Our new pharmacy robot is a big step forward in improving patient safety at the RUH. The robots read the bar codes on the medicines before it selects them, which is a much safer system than the human eye. The risk of dispensing errors is reduced and pharmacy staff check against the prescription to ensure the right medicines, dose and expiration date goes to the ward.

"The robot also helps to reduce waste by monitoring expiry dates - when drugs are delivered the packages will be scanned into the robot and stored so that the older stock is used first."

Automated dispensing systems are an extremely important part of an NHS pharmacy modernisation strategy. In practice, a robot dispenses prescriptions faster and more accurately than humans and enables pharmacies to directly free up staff to have a more patient focused role.

The RUH robot picks between 1500 and 1700 items a day mainly for dispensing but also for ward stock.

Sue adds "The robot will allow us to increase the amount of individual dispensings we provide. These go into patient lockers at the bedside, leading to a much more personalised system than the ward drug trolley. Ultimately the robots enable us to release nursing time and allow our skilled pharmacy staff to spend more time with patients discussing any issues they have around their medication.

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