

With local surgeries announcing a move to a new location over a mile away, the clock was ticking for HMI Pharmacy in Lancashire.

Customer profile

Pharmacy owner Zia Ashraf faced a difficult situation. The surgery that provided the bulk of prescriptions to his business, HMI Pharmacy, had signalled it would be moving away to a local health centre. For Zia, there was a very real prospect that customers would move with it, leading to a potentially significant decline in prescription numbers and income.

Doing nothing was not an option. Kirkham, an area with a large elderly population, has a total of five pharmacies to choose from and one particular competitor to HMI was already beginning to grow their share of scripts. Zia knew he had to find a way of strengthening ties with patients and offering something that would differentiate his business, helping him stand out from the crowd.

The Pharmaself24 Solution

Zia identified that automated collection would address many of these issues. It was a technology already on his radar, having earlier met Ryszard Cygan, co-CEO of Hub and Spoke Innovations, at a Numark conference and discussed how the Pharmaself24 had transformed his own business, West Elloe Pharmacy in Spalding. After undertaking further research, Zia decided to make contact with Ryszard again to set up a viewing and demo.



“It’s a balancing act. I still want to have a connection with my patients”

Mayank Patel, Director and Superintendent
Pharmacist, Pearl Chemist Group

The trip was enough to confirm his decision. In today's 24-hour society, where customers are increasingly used to the convenience of self-service, the Pharmaself24 eradicated the risk of patients making unnecessary journeys or wasting time while they wait, often impatiently, for prescriptions to be prepared and bagged.

More than that, the Pharmaself24 helped galvanise the team behind a clear strategic goal to become the community's 24-hour prescription drop-off and collection point.

The Impact

The Pharmaself24 has been transformational for Zia and his patients. The team aim to secure nominations from patients so that electronic scripts are sent directly to HMI, where patients are signed up to the 24-hour collection service. Office workers, shift workers and those working long hours in the local rural economy can now pick up their medicines easily at a time that suits them, with some even visiting the store in the middle of the night.

The technology is entirely complementary to the pharmacy's customer offering. It's not a case of one or the other, says Zia, with patients who use the machine still opting to come in and access the advice of the pharmacy team.

"It's a balancing act. I still want to have a connection with my patients," he says. Prescriptions numbers had remained fairly stable in the previous eight years but following the installation of the Pharmaself24 Zia says they are up by 50%.

Prior to the machine being installed, Zia and his team set about establishing a system for automated collection, introducing a new colour scheme for medicine baskets. And if preparations among the team were important to adapt to new working methods, preparation of the ageing building was essential.

Having secured planning permission, a week prior to installation in April 2018 the window and brickwork at the front of the shop were removed and the floor prepared to make way for the Pharmaself24. On the day of installation, the machine slotted in seamlessly.

On the one hand, it has achieved the direct benefit of enhancing customer convenience but, crucially, it has delivered the indirect benefit of being a real talking point among the local community.

Any initial concerns that the Pharmaself24 would have a knock-on effect on walk-in trade for OTC sales were quickly snuffed out. Indeed, the reverse is true: OTC sales at HMI Pharmacy have, like prescription numbers, increased by 50% since it was installed. It has even opened the door for out-of-hours collection of ad hoc sales, with the machine providing secure access to medicines paid for over the phone.

Despite these impressive growth figures, however, there has been no requirement to increase staff. The Pharmaself24 has provided reliable service, with a direct line to Hub and Spoke Innovations providing on-demand answers for any technical queries, which can be managed via remote control of the machine.

