



Finding a hospital pharmacy automation partner

3 key questions to ask yourself: in your search for a transformation partner

In 2023 we have an urgent need to rethink the future of hospital pharmacy.¹



273 million
medication errors



£98 million
cost of medication errors to NHS England



100,000
clinical vacancies



180,000
Hospital bed day per year linked with drug reaction

To make hospital workflows safe and efficient for your patients and staff, automation is key.

Many Trusts across the UK have come to this same conclusion and have begun the process of adding automated solutions to their hospital pharmacies and wards.

One of the difficulties you may face, in adding automation, is finding the right partner. This short guide has been developed to help you begin your journey.

Getting started

Before we introduce the 3 key questions, here's some useful tips to help you get started.

Decipher critical areas of need

Automation can be installed throughout the entire continuum of care - from managing controlled drugs (CDs) to gaining visibility of supply inventory. Most NHS trusts will look to automate A&E and critical care units first, focusing on CD management. This is because both A&E and critical care units are:

1. High Risk

A&E & critical care units hold many CDs, the CDs in question are often complex medications. Extra care needs to be taken

2. High Cost

At Salford royal, through 2020-2021, drug expenditure in the Critical Care unit was: £1,164,963.89, compared to cardiology, which had an expenditure of £163,579.80. Automation helps protect these high value items²

3. High volume

Particularly in relation to A&E, staff need quick access to medication to serve the huge numbers of patients coming in and out of their doors.

¹: Economic analysis of the prevalence and clinical and economic burden of medication error in England. BMJ Quality & Safety, 2020

²: NHS Northern Care Alliance, NHS Foundation Trust



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Determine your main objectives

For the areas of need you've detailed, consider the outcomes you'd like to achieve through automation:

- Reduced risk of fraudulent activity
- More transparency to your point of care medications administration
- Reduced levels of tied up supplies
- Elimination of key errors in medication administration
- Or reduced length of medication rounds

Whatever your objectives, outlining and prioritising them will enable you to better understand your needs from a partner

Write your business case

Establishing a robust case for change, that supports approval to proceed to later stages, will bring clarity and backing to the project. This is crucial as one of the main barriers to entry is convincing stakeholders of the need for automation¹, one of the main barriers to entry is convincing stakeholders of the need for automation.

3 Key questions to ask yourself in your search for a digital & automation partner

- 1 Is their system compliant with NHS regulations?

UK regulation within the NHS, particularly for controlled drugs (CDs), is comprehensive.

Finding a partner who can meet NHS standards should be the first step in your journey. Without this, already complex processes become more costly and inefficient. If you look at MedX, our management system for medication and controlled drugs stock, this is developed in the UK for the NHS. It means it's designed to meet NHS requirements for IT cyber-security and regulatory needs. It's fit for purpose.



Ascertain whether software available from a potential partner meets NHS standards. Missing this step could cost you indispensable time, money, and efficiency.



¹ European Autonomous Pharmacy Frame Work Symposium, European Association of Hospital Pharmacies



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2 Are their solutions interoperable with our current IT systems & adaptable to our future requirements?

Let's talk about IT systems

Integration with your current EMR/EPR system you have in place is important. If you're looking to expand your IT systems, finding a partner whose systems can communicate and exchange usable data with your current software is a no-brainer.



This will save you costs, and a long list of inefficiencies arising in the future.

Adaptability to future requirements

Each Trust, each hospital, has needs specific to their staff and workflows. Adaptability in this context means being able to meet your growing demands.

This might include the ability to:

- add unique features. E.g. an emergency button to your ADC
- create unique designs. E.g. for larger robotics, creating custom sizes to fit your available space

Partners with problem solving capabilities within their product design and implementation will create the most effective outcomes for your trust.

3 Can we visit a reference site?

This is the best way to understand what your relationship with your partner is likely to be and to get a good idea of how they project manage.

Project management is at the centre of a successful automation project. You need to be looking for:

- seamless installation
- workflow expertise
- & customer service following an installation

A visit to a reference site will offer the opportunity to probe for the answers you need. If reference sites aren't available to visit, speak to peers within the industry.



An ideal partner will understand your requirements in the context of the NHS, your cost budget and be able to build an adaptable program of solutions to give you the patient outcomes you need.

Once you've established your partner as an affordable, viable and preferred option you can take the next step to write your Outline Business Case.

In the next segment you can learn key recommendations for your automation journey.



If you want learn more about partnering with Omnicell **contact us now**