

Get smart — get started with EPS

In this feature article, **Debbie Andalo** discusses what pharmacists can expect from suppliers as the electronic prescription service expands

Latest figures from NHS Connecting for Health (CfH), the Government agency delivering the National Programme for IT in England reported that by 23 August pharmacists had transmitted 3,525,441 prescription messages using the electronic prescription service (EPS). The number of pharmacists who had registered for an EPS smartcard with their primary care trust, to enable them to use the new prescription system, was 13,682 — nearly four times the number in April.

As these figures were released it became clear that, from this month, community pharmacists should begin to witness significant expansion in the introduction of EPS, since most pharmacy system suppliers have reported that they are on the verge of being able to offer the system to pharmacists nationally. The picture emerging last month, based on the results of a survey carried out this summer by *The Pharmaceutical Journal*, is that the suppliers have developed their systems to meet the demands of the new pharmacy contract, from essential to advanced services. [These suppliers will also provide systems for Wales but the EPS process is expected to be different. Guidance will be issued shortly on how to choose the best upgrade.]

Most plan to offer electronic remote technical support to pharmacists in order to avoid disruption to businesses. They are, however, also offering the option of on-site support to resolve a problem which cannot be fixed remotely, usually promising that it can be sorted out within a maximum of eight hours.

Nearly all the companies are offering EPS to community pharmacists as a total package consisting of software, hardware and connectivity, and they are confident that their systems are secure. The training options on offer vary between the companies, from remote internet training to training days for groups of pharmacists at an agreed venue.

Most of the eight pharmacy system suppliers questioned by the *PJ* were unable to say how they would introduce the second phase (release 2) of EPS. Only one supplier predicted it would be likely to charge pharmacists for the necessary software upgrade while two others were confident that they would not expect to charge a fee.

Accreditation and roll-out

This summer, the *PJ* asked eight pharmacy computer suppliers when they expected to be able to roll out their EPS systems to commu-



Ian Taylor (left), sales and marketing director of RX Systems, discusses the company's EPS software with a client, Duncan Murray, managing director of C G Murray pharmacies, Worcestershire

nity pharmacists and what kind of support and service the profession could expect from them. The pharmacy chain UniChem, which is adopting the Nexphase EPS system, also contributed its views.

The *PJ* survey revealed that at the time of questioning, only two EPS systems — AAH's LINKEvolution and Cegedim Rx Ltd's Nexphase had achieved full accreditation from CfH and were being rolled out nationally to pharmacists.

AAH, which claims it was the first supplier to be accredited by CfH for a national roll-out of its systems, told the *PJ* that it expects to roll out LINKEvolution to the majority of its customers by the end of the year. Since it was accredited in October 2005 it has brought EPS to more than 500 pharmacies, the company said.

Other suppliers, Fusion Health, Hadley Healthcare Solutions Ltd, Positive Solutions and RX Systems, have now been accredited and expect to be in a position to roll-out nationally in September. Cegedim Rx Ltd said its EPS "Pharmacy manager" product was given the go ahead for a national roll-out at the end of August, while its third EPS product, Mediphase, is not expected to be accredited and rolled out until the end of the year.

QicSCRIPT, the EPS system from System Solutions, had also been accredited by CfH

but the company predicted it would not be in a position for a national roll-out until October.

Pharmacy computer supplier Ascribe Plc, however, predicted its EPS system called Park Systems Ascribe would be compliant by the end of September. It would then be tested at five pilot sites before being rolled out nationally, probably at the end of January 2007. A company spokesman said: "The acquisition of Park Systems by Ascribe Plc caused an initial delay in the development of ETP functionality as both companies sought to define a roadmap to move the product forward. With the road map in place, the changes to the PMR (patient medication record) product to support ETP have been completed on schedule."

Technical support

Pharmacy computer suppliers have also revealed details of the technical support they plan to offer pharmacists running ETP.

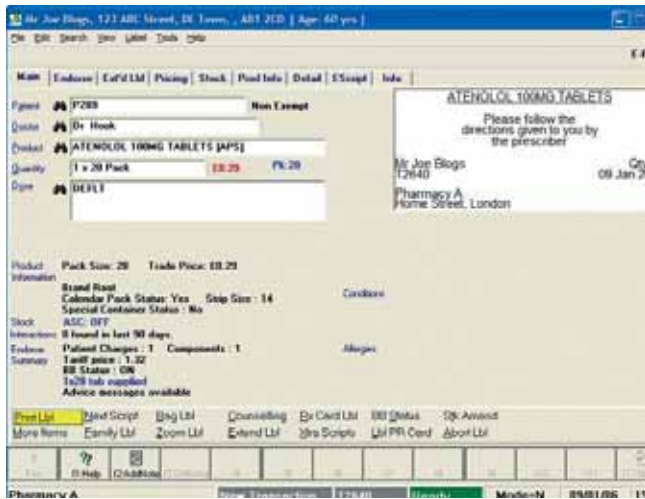
Ascribe Plc has established a technical support team at its headquarters in Bolton, Lancashire. The team will be able to access phar-

macy sites remotely and the company was confident that problems could be resolved quickly and accurately. Remote access also means that software updates can be made without the need for a site visit, the company said. However, it pointed out, it will also have a maintenance team which can, if necessary, visit the pharmacy.

Positive Solutions Ltd has a triage system, inspected and accredited by CfH, to deal with EPS problems that pharmacists might have.

AAH revealed that it has 13 support analysts working from its customer systems service desk who are available to pharmacists who experience problems with EPS. A company spokesman explained how the system works: "The first point of contact is the first-line support officer; these officers solve 95 per cent of calls. Problems requiring further investigation are handled by second-line support technicians. Third-line technicians interrogate customers' data if required and liaise with the development team regarding fixes and product developments." There is also on-site support if necessary. The support team also offers advice about hardware and will deal with any general questions pharmacists might have about EPS and the new pharmacy contract.

Cegedim Rx Ltd has a helpdesk service offering support and advice for all software,



A snapshot of the repeat dispensing screen that is part of AAH's EPS system, LINKEvolution

hardware problems and issues around clinical data, a company spokesman said.

It promises that it has a "truly integrated one-stop shop" support service. "This approach is very much in the pharmacies' interest as they will have a single point of contact for all support issues and will not be in a situation where they do not know who to call, or where a supplier does not accept responsibility for issues," said a company spokesman.

UniChem revealed that it is offering dedicated IT support through its IT Solutions team. Pharmacists who want to find out more about what the team offers should ring the company's Freephone number (0800 0322 454), UniChem told the *PJ*.

RX Systems has a technical help desk for pharmacists open from 8.30am until 6pm Monday to Friday and from 9am to 1pm on Sundays. A spokesman said: "All our systems are loaded with remote diagnostics and asset management software to aid in fault diagnosis and proactive error detections. This means that when you call the help desk we can easily access your system to determine what the problem is." The EPS will, according to RX Systems, have to rely heavily on patient medication record (PMR) systems. A spokesman explained: "When it is fully implemented, prescriptions will be entirely electronic, so if your PMR system is not working you will not be able to access prescriptions."

The company explained that if this happens, a pharmacist would be expected to follow national guidelines and be obliged to direct patients to the nearest pharmacy that has EPS instead. A spokesman said: "It is therefore really important that pharmacists are able to put right any problems they have quickly to prevent a major impact on their business." RX Systems promises it will fix any problems with hardware within eight hours. It also offers pharmacists "disaster recovery" — a back up of systems data, off-site, which will be encrypted.

Systems Solutions is also promising a customer support help line team which can access systems remotely. A spokesman said: "Should an issue persist it will be handed over

to our second-line support team, comprised of a nationwide team of experienced engineers who provide 24-hour on-site support to customers with urgent issues."

Hadley Healthcare Solutions Ltd has boosted its team of trained IT help desk staff by 75 per cent in the past year in anticipation of workload increases created by EPS introduction so that it can maintain its quality standards, the company explained.

Fusion Health Ltd said any software problems with its EPS system, called CAPA, will be dealt with

remotely since all its customers will be connected with broadband. Issues with any hardware will be dealt with under contract by another company, which has guaranteed it will repair or replace equipment within eight hours.

Training

Suppliers are planning a variety of training packages to help pharmacists with EPS.

Fusion Health Ltd said it will offer "remote" training to pharmacists so that there is minimal disruption to their working day. "Remote training is available at prearranged times. The CAPA training team will be authorised to access the client's terminal and provide training on any aspect of the system." Additionally there will be group training days in a central location for pharmacists and their staff. The company also promises to provide any in-house training which a pharmacy may require to meet its own particular needs. UniChem said it is running a series of off-site training days for pharmacists and dispensers. It will also provide them with e-learning training packages.

Positive Solutions Ltd predicts no major changes to current provision because training required for EPS has already been included in its timetable. But it pointed out that the principle behind its training programme is that technicians who establish the N3 connection will be responsible for training EPS users.

Hadley Healthcare Solutions Ltd is offering a variety of training options: on-site training, or training via the telephone or the internet. There will also be on-screen help files and it is in the process of developing interactive training guides as well.

Systems Solutions said it intends to train key staff in the pharmacy to use the system, who will then be able to train other staff in turn. The company said: "This provides the pharmacy with better value for money." Users will also be given manuals and guides for future reference.

RX Systems will provide on-site training for pharmacists to include how to use the smart card, N3 access, the bar code prescrip-

tion process and how the EPS system differs from the present pharmacy computer system.

Cegedim Rx Ltd has a team of more than 40 specialist IT trainers. All pharmacists new to the system will be given a day's training, with the option to request more, it promises.

AAH said pharmacists will receive their EPS training on-line. Pharmacists will also have an EPS user guide. This training, the company explained, follows a series of evening workshops the company ran last year for pharmacists who intended to sign up to their EPS system. Ascribe Plc said its EPS system already includes a training package for users. But, the company said, its implementation team will also be able to respond to any specific training needs pharmacists require.

Contract obligations

All suppliers predicted that their EPS systems will help pharmacists meet their obligations under the new pharmacy contract.

Fusion Health said its system will also help meet pharmacist's clinical governance needs because each staff member has a personal identification number and any tasks carried out on the system can be traced back to an individual. Its EPS system, CAPA, also includes a medicines use review (MUR) template. Once an MUR has been carried out it is registered on the MUR log as well as in the patient's file. There are also other templates which pharmacists can use for patients with asthma and cardiovascular disease. Another CAPA template exists for pharmacists to complete an advanced medication review and pharmacists will also be able to record patient's tests results on the system. An instalments log is written into CAPA which can help with repeat dispensing, Fusion Health said. Pharmacists will be able to see the due date for a repeat prescription and follow up those patients who fail to turn up when expected.

Ascribe Plc said its EPS system provides for MURs and repeat dispensing. It also has features which can record details of patient interventions and health-check monitoring.

AAH has created an MUR "wizard" for its LINKEvolution EPS product. A spokesman said: "This enables the pharmacist to record information in an electronic version of the standard form. This is integrated with existing data in the patient's medical record and provides the comprehensive audit trail demanded by the contract." There is the option to include information about patient interventions and the system provides help with repeat prescribing as well.

Cegedim RX said that its Pharmacy Manager and Nexphase products have software which allows pharmacists to plan and perform MURs. There is also the opportunity to record clinical interventions either during dispensing or as a follow up.

RX Systems said its EPS software meets all the essential and advanced service criteria which pharmacists need to meet under the new contract such as MURs, repeat prescribing and clinical governance obligations.

UniChem confirmed that the EPS system it is using, Nexphase, can create electronic records of MURs and has tools to help with repeat prescribing to help pharmacists with the demands of their new contract.

Positive Solutions said its Analyst EPS system was created with the new contract in mind right from the beginning. Details of over-the-counter and prescribed medicines can be added to the patient's medicines record from any computer terminal. The software also has the capability to enable pharmacists to record details about interventions, complaints, repeat dispensing and prescription referrals.

Details of a patient's medical condition, the type or amount of medicine they are taking and their age can all be identified by the software in the Systems Solutions EPS system, called QicSCRIPT, which can make MURs quicker and easier to complete, according to the company. It claims that, using the system, a pharmacist could complete an MUR in six minutes. The system also enables patients to be contacted with a mobile text message to remind them to take their medicine, collect a repeat prescription or to tell them that their repeat prescription is due. QicSCRIPT also maintains a complete patient medicines record which can be shared across a pharmacy chain or be kept by an independent pharmacy.

Built into the system is the ability to identify the potential for medicines interaction at the point of dispensing. There is also support for repeat dispensing.

Hadley Healthcare Solutions Ltd said its Eclipse EPS system can help pharmacists meet their obligations under the new contract for essential, advanced and enhanced services. Eclipse can also "batch" prescriptions. Colour coding and different type fonts can be used to identify whether items have been supplied to a patient over the counter, or whether they are emergency or private medicines supplies. Pharmacists will have the option to record a "significant event intervention" such as patient being referred back to their GP on the system and it can also generate patient information leaflets. Eclipse will also offer pharmacists an electronic MUR template.

Security and access

All suppliers were confident that their systems were secure. Ascribe Plc said its EPS system uses encryption and is "separated via firewalls from local network traffic". There are also multiple authentication checks at local, national and NHS spine levels. AAH has inbuilt anti-virus software, the company confirmed. "AAH has also received accreditation to provide connection to the new national network (N3) — confirmation that our Link IT system is recognised as secure by the CfH compliance team."

Cegedim Rx Ltd went out of its way to reassure pharmacists that the electronic links in its EPS systems were safe from the threat of outside hackers, viruses and spyware.

"Pharmacists can be confident that the N3 connection is incredibly secure with multiple layers of protection," said the company.

Positive Solutions has "sophisticated" log-on facilities which restrict access to users with a valid name and password. Access can also be restricted to only certain parts of the system if necessary. There is also a clear audit trail which can link user to event, it confirmed.

Hadley Healthcare Solutions Ltd said users have to have a confidential password to access their system and its N3 connection was via a secure CfH connection.

Systems Solutions, meanwhile, said its system had been designed with variable access, depending on the needs of the user and their role within the pharmacy. A full audit trail is also written in, the company confirmed.

The N3 connection for the Nexphase system being used by UniChem includes virus protection, firewalls, web content filtering and intruder detection. The company has also promised it can provide power failure protection and data recovery if the system fails.

There is a full audit control in the ProScript EPS system from RX Systems. Connection to N3 will be through a managed route and authorised supplier. There will also be data back up if ProScript fails for any reason and anti-virus software will also be built in. Meanwhile, Fusion Health said that its CAPA product met all the security criteria it had to fulfil to be accredited by the National Programme for IT.

Release 2 charges

Looking ahead, the suppliers were divided on whether they intend to charge pharmacists for the next stage of the EPS, called "release 2". This stage will build on release 1, which was designed to prove the technical stability and safety of the system and consider its local prescribing and dispensing processes. Release 2 is described by CfH as the "transitional stage" where pharmacists will move towards the full introduction of EPS.

According to the responses to the *PJ* summer survey, only Fusion Health said it expected an upgrade fee for release 2 although no final decision had been taken. RX Systems, Positive Solutions and Systems Solutions said they had no plans to

levy a charge, while the other suppliers, Ascribe Plc, Cegedim Rx Ltd, AAH, Hadley Healthcare Solutions Ltd, and UniChem, were unable to say whether they planned to charge for the upgrade.

RX Systems said pharmacists will receive the upgrade electronically which means it is unlikely to require a pharmacy visit. AAH predicted release 2 would be provided through a simple software upgrade. However, the other suppliers said it was too soon to say how they planned to introduce the next stage. The details were still being worked out.

Nearly all the suppliers are offering a complete EPS package which includes the necessary hardware, software and connectivity.

Systems Solutions is the only supplier questioned by the *PJ* that is offering pharmacists the choice to buy only the software rather than the complete set. RX Systems also said its existing customers who are keen to use its EPS would only need "peripheral" upgrades to their present system.

Positive Solutions said it had taken a policy decision to offer only a complete package for EPS. The company said: "The complexity of the solution is such that any other option would be next to impossible to support to the standards required by CfH."

Why choose us?

When suppliers were asked by the *Journal* why pharmacists should choose them above

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their EPS competitors, the responses were varied.

Hadley Healthcare Solutions Ltd said its system was easy to use. It has a "logical layout" and can be used with a keyboard, mouse or both. It is a flexible system and if necessary settings can be controlled from a pharmacy group head office. "Pharmacy IT is not our sideline interest — it is our whole business, so it is clear that we are able to focus solely on the delivery of innovative solutions to meet their needs," the company said.

Fusion Health said CAPA had been developed by pharmacists "out of necessity". "The frustrations that many pharmacists experience from outdated models of practice in pharmacy have been directed into delivering an efficient IT solution," the company said. "Its core database is brand new and therefore can cater for the many new roles that pharmacists have to deliver now and in the future." It is an integrated and efficient system.

Cegedim RX described itself as the "market leader" claiming that just under half of all UK pharmacies use its products in their dispensaries. "We are part of a global organisation with a turnover of over £500m — we are a stable organisation with a growing user base that will be able to provide long-term system development and support." It described pharmacy IT as its "core business". It provides high quality, customer-focused products with "excellent" support services, it said. The company said it cares about its customers and is committed to development and support.

Ascribe Plc said its Park product was one of the first systems to be developed for medicines labelling and the system has evolved to support the increasing needs of community pharmacists to become "one of the most sophisticated dispensary systems available in the UK". Its computer systems have been developed by community pharmacists to address "practical business and safety issues" and the development of EPS reflects its commitment to helping front-line pharmacists.

The company Ascribe was founded by health care professionals and Ascribe Plc is the market leader in medicines management, according to the company. It focuses on solutions to improve patient care: "We believe our experience makes us the partner of choice for retail pharmacy, both now and in the future and see the delivery of ETP as the first step towards the ultimate aim of integrating more closely the primary and secondary care medicines management processes."

Systems Solutions said pharmacy IT is "more than just EPS". It said its QicSCRIPT system is the result of 20 years of expertise in pharmacy and clinical technology. "Every feature is primarily designed to provide pharmacists with the clinical tools to conduct and record the new pharmacy contract services, as well as to automate as many time-consuming pharmacy tasks as possible to help pharmacists save time to deliver the services that will help them generate more revenue for their businesses."

Experience in community pharmacy IT for 14 years makes RX Systems the perfect choice if pharmacists are still undecided about who should be their EPS supplier, according to the company. It understands pharmacists who want a system that meets the demands of the new pharmacy contract but also allows them to dispense prescriptions quickly and in a user-friendly way. The company recognises the importance of offering flexible solutions because the needs of community pharmacists vary. "RX Systems will be delivering the EPS service within the IT allowances as defined under the new pharmacy contract and this will be guaranteed for the period of the contract term," the company pointed out.

Positive Solutions said its Analyst Integrated Pharmacy System provides a "complete solution" for the pharmacy covering over-the-counter stock and medicines as well as the patient medicines record, the new pharmacy contract and EPS. The system is easy to use and can be operated via a mouse, touch screen or keyboard or all three. The company provides strong support to clients and is an independent and innovative systems provider.

AAH came forward with 10 reasons why pharmacists should select its LINKEvolution for EPS. The system was the first commercially available EPS system to be accredited for national roll-out and was the only one which was accredited up until late July this year. AAH has nine months' experience of rolling out EPS at its pilot sites. The company takes charge of all aspects of EPS implementation — all the pharmacist has to do is obtain their smartcard from their primary care trust. AAH boasts it offers comprehensive technical support, has a "close working relationship" with Connecting for Health and more than 40 years' experience developing IT solutions for pharmacies.

UniChem has a dedicated technical support team which will meet the individual needs of individual pharmacists. "We aim to take the hassle out of EPS for our independent customers by offering a complete one-stop shop solution," said the company.

Scotland

When asked whether their system had the functionality to support the new contract in Scotland, there was a mixed response.

UniChem said that the Nexphase system has full functionality for the Scottish Electronic Minor Ailments System (eMAS). AAH said that its LINKEvolution Version 9 includes the functionality for eMAS and has already been implemented at pharmacies in Scotland from April. Positive Solutions said Analyst provides eMAS functionality and is already being used in Scotland. "It will provide the Scottish version of EPS in due course," said the company. Rx Systems confirmed it has functionality for the new pharmacy contract in Scotland and meets phase 1 of the ePharmacy programme. QicSCRIPT is capable of supporting the contract in Scotland, Systems Solutions confirmed.

The company said: "We are currently working on developing and delivering eMAS functionality in QicSCRIPT."

Hadley Healthcare Solutions Ltd confirmed that its eclipse system is used by pharmacists in Scotland for eMAS and it plans to provide version updates to meet the demands of the Scottish contract. Cegedim RX said both Pharmacy Manager and Nexphase were rolled out in Scotland with eMAS functionality earlier this year.

But Fusion Health confirmed CAPA did not offer functionality in Scotland.

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