

## **Shere Surgery External 24/7 Prescription Dispenser**

As in surgeries across the country, Shere Surgery has had to restrict what goes on in the premises during the COVID-19 pandemic. One implication is that the dispensary has had to operate on the basis of one patient in the building at a time with anyone else waiting outside. Fortunately, the weather has been kind. As the surgery is used by people from across the Parish, this queueing has been experienced by a significant number. The Doctors and Surgery staff are aware that this is not ideal and it has reinforced the need to review how patients get prescriptions dispensed. There have been an increasing number of telephone consultations, as in many surgeries, to cut down unnecessary attendance and this is particularly true of the current period so patients have to go to the surgery when it is open to pick up the dispensed prescription. Adding to these are those on repeat prescriptions which can be requested electronically. Among both groups are those who are working who can find it difficult also to come to the dispensary when it is open. There is therefore a considerable cohort of patients who would appreciate a more flexible way of obtaining what has been prescribed.

There is now a machine that can be installed on the outside wall of a surgery that will dispense and the Surgery would like one. It is somewhat similar to a large cash machine. Patients are informed by text when their prescription has been dispensed and are given a code. They then have a few days to go to the machine, enter the code, pay by card at the machine if necessary, and collect the medicine from a drawer that opens. This is available 24/7. Chilled medicines and controlled drugs cannot be dispensed in this way. Up to 750 prescriptions can be dealt with each week, more than enough capacity for Shere Surgery.

This machine is installed in surgeries and pharmacies already and saves queueing, allows users to choose when they go, and gives the dispensers more time to dispense. There would be no job losses if installed at Shere. The cost is of the order of £40,000.

SALV has been asked if the money could be raised. The local community has responded magnificently in a very short period of time and promises have been made totalling not far short of the £40,000. That sum covers supply and installation, but not any clearance and laying of a path to the machine which would need to be on the front wall of the dispensary on the west side of the surgery entrance.

Both SALV and the Surgery would like the Council to consider if this project is worthwhile, and whether it can give support either verbally or by way of a donation.

Below are a piece by Dr Emma Watts, GP at Shere Surgery, the machine plan and a comment from a GP at Drifffield Surgery in Yorkshire, one of the installations together with an image of it there.

## Appendix 1

From Dr Emma Watts, Shere Surgery

The current pandemic has created unprecedented levels of pressure on the NHS, and our ways of working have changed dramatically. Dispensary have really felt the strain, with a huge surge in demand for medication, plus the difficulty of staff self isolating, and attempts to keep a social distance in a small dispensary! There have been very long queues, and lots of face to face contacts, which have risk attached for both staff and patients. Our staff have been using our precious PPE, and we have installed a perspex screen across the serving hatch. The whole team have been putting in a vast amount of additional hours just to try to keep up with demand.

We are hoping to provide a solution to this in the form of a Dispensing Machine! This is essentially similar to a cash point machine, as it is mounted in an external wall and accessible 24 hours a day. As a patient you request your prescription as normal, and receive a text message when the medicine is put into the machine. You have 3 days to collect the medication, after which it is returned to stock if not collected. There is a reminder text when only 24 hours remains to collect. The patient enters a code into the machine, pays by contactless payment (if not a free prescription) and the medication is presented out of a hatch.

The machine can dispense a whopping 750 prescriptions per week, which would fit our normal rate of supply. There is no cash held by the machine, and no controlled drugs, so nothing of value to tempt theft. Attempted theft has not been known from the machines already functional elsewhere.

Those that cannot use the machine would use dispensary as usual. There would be no threat to dispensary jobs as the dispensers are so busy that any time saving would allow them more time to devote to more complex patients.

Clearly there are loads of benefits the machine could provide during this pandemic. Reduced face to face contact, reduced queuing, the ability to collect at any time, even when we are closed. These benefits will remain when the pandemic has passed. The machine would also offer benefits to our commuting population, who struggle to get to us.

The Government drive is toward digitalising primary care, and we decided to embrace this by buying AskmyGP rather than waiting to have a cheaper service forced upon us. So far through this pandemic we have found other creative ways to help people remotely, such as the ability to send sick notes as an attachment to a text message, and video consultations.

The dispensing machine would compliment this brilliantly as the final step in the process. Currently these services are all helping to minimise the need for patient contact due to virus spread. We are keen to return to face to face contact as soon as possible, but we can learn from the changes we have made during the pandemic and keep all the consulting options available as different styles suit different patients. Similarly, if the machine is used by the

majority to collect their prescriptions, there will be quicker access to dispensary for those who can't use the machine.

We hope you are happy with the way that we are trying to modernise services in line with requirements, whilst trying to maintain the continuity of care that is so important to all of us in General Practice.

Appendix 2  
The dispenser



**Technical information MULTI**



- 24 Touch screen
- Receipt printer
- Credit card reader
- Scanner: max. A4 format, 350 mm/sec (optional)

**Electrical Consumption**

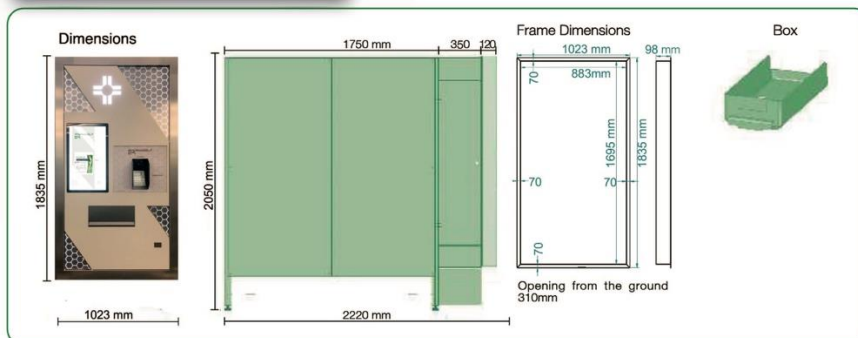
- 140 Watt

**Weight**

- 590 kg

**Storage Configuration**

Box	130x100x175 mm	110 pcs.
Box	150x100x275 mm	55 pcs.
Box	250x140x275 mm	16 pcs.



Continued

### Appendix 3

Comment from Dr Neil Folwell of Driffield Surgery, Yorkshire with image of installation.

We have found it to be very useful. We have about 400sq miles to cover and our practice is in the centre of the local town so for patients going to work early/late it has been very useful for them to collect medications. They get a text when their medications go in the machine and then then can come and collect it at their convenience 24 hours per day for the next 4 days.

Often our patients will order their medications on-line and then get a text when then can collect. In a sense this is a click and collect service.

In addition we can have a telephone consultation with patients - we can prescribe medication and they can collect it - again at their convenience especially if it is later on in the day. We close up at 6:00pm so this means that our patients do not have to rush down before then.

With COVID-19 we have seen a significant uptake in the usage as our patients do not want to come to the surgery.

Obviously fridge items and controlled drugs are not put in the machine.

Only a few issues now and again which have been easily solved.

We have been pleased with how the machine operates and the service.



Jonathan Cross  
27/4/2020