

# Does Integrating eMAR for Senior Living Communities Live up to the Hype?

*Written by: Neil Marshall; Vice-president of Pharmacy Services*



As a senior living operator, you are working hard every day to attract new residents and then keep those same residents healthy and safe. A strong medication management program is critical to both of those objectives and many of you have taken the first step by adopting an EHR and eMAR system. However, concerns can still arise around whether or not an integration with your pharmacy provider could prove difficult, time consuming, and not really make much of a difference in the end.

The reality is that the benefits of integrating, when executed correctly, are exponential but when taken lightly, can be disastrous. Our team has spent the last several years working hand-in-hand with our customers and we are now connected with 85 percent of them, and growing. That progress has come with hard work, bumps and bruises, but the upside is real:

1. Pharmacy technicians working in a controlled environment key medication orders. They receive specialized training, and the high repetition leads to a developed expertise. That focus and expertise leads to improved accuracy.
2. All new orders are reviewed and approved by a pharmacist before landing on the MAR, another key to order accuracy.
3. Our experience tells us that in the absence of an integration, the drift between the records in the pharmacy compared to those at the community level can be as much as 30 percent. With integration, the pharmacy and community systems share a common medication profile and that common profile allows the pharmacist to become a member of your collaborative care team. The accurate profile is available to the

pharmacist so that each new order or change of condition leads to a check for allergies, duplicate therapy, drug-drug interactions, and other clinical concerns.

4. Leaving data entry in the hands of the pharmacy frees up significant staff time to spend on direct patient care.
5. No more refill stickers! Ordering a refill of medication is as simple as a single click on a reorder button in your system.

Our path to a highly integrated pharmacy had its twists and turns ... teachable moments if you will. So, what have we learned about keys to success?

- 1. Heavy Training for a Smooth Transition.** Like most software implementations, training must remain a cornerstone to the program. Proper investment here will prevent what could develop into significant work disruptions. Even if your care staff already uses an eMAR system, a pharmacy integration introduces new workflows that users need to understand and master. Expect a minimum of 4 hours of high quality training for each user. It's also critical to develop one or two "Super Users" who understand the integration at a more technical level. Your software provider, and in some cases, your pharmacy, can help you with the training effort.
- 2. Understand and execute your new workflows.** For example, what was a monthly recap in the printed medical record world becomes a daily task. New orders will appear in your eMAR system and employees must review them carefully and accept them into the

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system if correct. If your software requires acknowledgement of medication deliveries, set a plan to do this upon receipt of medication to keep your system up to date. Asking your software provider and pharmacy for guidance on all new workflows helps to keep your data current and will generate time savings.

**3. Let the integration work for you.** Many systems allow community care staff users to enter orders in addition to the pharmacy team. This is an important feature for emergencies, but if overused, will cause medication profiles in the two systems to be out of sync. Work with your pharmacy provider to agree on a turn around time for order entry, and measure results so that both parties perform within that agreed upon standard.

**4. Submit clear clinical documentation to the pharmacy.** The quality of the data entry performed by pharmacy staff directly correlates to the quality of the documentation

they are working with. Unfortunately, despite advancements in technology, community care and pharmacy staff often receive documentation that doesn't contain all the answers. If community staff has additional information that would help guide interpretation at the pharmacy, take a moment to include that guidance on the document. Spending the time to note these details prior to submitting the document will save significant time on the backend.

**5. Integrate with experts.** Evaluate your pharmacy and software provider carefully to make sure they have the experience and expertise to support you.

Integrating with your pharmacy is about more than software. Much more. It's about a partnership that calls for communication and understanding workflows on both sides of the integration. It's about users: real people that are new to putting down a pen to engage with a keyboard and screen. And it's about preparation and attention to details. The good news is that the payoff is there.

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For more information, please visit:

<http://www.consonushealth.com/pharmacy/consonus-technology/>



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