



Pharmasave #736, Gananoque, Ontario

New Robot Fills Staffing Gap At Busy Ontario Community Pharmacy



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Kirby Lester KL108 Secure Robot

Daryl and Eric McElwain are battle-hardened veterans of the COVID-19 vaccine tidal wave. Like so many pharmacy owners and managers, they had to creatively divert their staff in their Gananoque, Ontario retail pharmacy to handle the extra load. They were relieved that ‘Kirby’, their newest member of the team, was on the job.

The father-and-son team was referring to their Kirby Lester KL108 robotic filling device, installed mid-pandemic just before vaccinations were made available and pharmacies took their position on the front lines. “Kirby was a huge help. It was like having another tech for 10 hours a day,” asserts Daryl, the father of the team and registered pharmacist; Eric is their business manager.

Pharmacies Stretched Past Their Limits

The movement to push pharmacies from prescription fillers to healthcare partners is steadily progressing through Canada and the U.S. This astounding pivot-point in pharmacy also stretches pharmacies to their limits. Doing more with the same staff level is a formula for failure; that is where technology like the KL108 is the game-changer, especially when the staff is toiling for months administering COVID-19 vaccinations.

Vaccine Program Causes Spike In Labor Demands

The McElwains operate three Pharmasave pharmacies in Ontario. Two smaller pharmacies are in Kingston and Lansdowne, ON but Pharmasave Gananoque (Store 736) is the family’s cornerstone, the top-performing pharmacy in its corner of southeast Ontario.

In its 25th year of operation, Pharmasave Gananoque processes 130,000 Rx/year (60% is vial filled and 40% is LTC blister pack) and boasts a robust front-end business with home healthcare, diabetes, colostomy, compression wear and even an international travel clinic.

The expansion was necessary, even before the pandemic and ensuing vaccination boom hit. The McElwains did a major dispensary renovation that doubled the space to 1,200 square feet, and they fortuitously planned space for future dispensing technology.

“We had operated a Parata Mini that dispensed 45 meds, but we were moving on for many reasons,” Daryl says. “I saw a Kirby Lester ad and called in to see what this KL108 was all about. Robots were always on the edge of our thinking, but we worried it was going to be just a more expensive technician. I tend to push for new technology and new processes

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Kirby Lester KL108 fully automates 108 top medications

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Self-Calibrating Cassettes Were #1 Feature

The number 1 selling feature for the McElwains was the KL108’s self-calibrating cassettes – new medications are easy to swap in and out of the robot quickly. However, the number 1 ROI consideration was labor reduction.

“We lost an employee and didn’t need to replace due to the robot. It is way more efficient than adding another FTE,” Daryl says. “Plus, it gives us capacity whenever we need it. When international travel bounces back, our travel clinic will have a ton of hands-on work with vaccines. It will take a toll on our workforce and we know with the robot we can absorb it.” Advantages To Pharmacy Managers Operating A Kirby Lester Robot

Top 4 Advantages For A Pharmacist

When asked about the pharmacy robot’s biggest advantages from a pharmacist’s perspective, Daryl McElwain stated the following list.

- 1. Customer perception:** “The KL108 makes us look cutting edge. 90% of our clients we know by name. The eight physicians in town know us very well. So, they took notice when we upgraded to this new technology.”
- 2. Tax benefit and ROI:** A Canadian 1-time tax clause was serendipitous. But even before that and Capsa’s competitive financing, the McElwains ran the numbers. “If you have a high volume or a small staff, this robot is definitely going to pay for itself,” Eric advises.
- 3. Staff freedom:** Pharmasave Gananoque plans to move into new areas like genetic testing, more travel vaccine plans, and marketing. Without the robot churning out prescriptions automatically, business expansion would be difficult.
- 4. Crunch time:** A 325-script Monday is common at Pharmasave Gananoque, with the majority hitting in the first three hours. Robots are very good at their singular job: quickly fill prescriptions without error, distraction, or complaint.

For more information, visit
<https://kirbylester.com/robotic-rx-filling/>