

In the UK pharmacy workflow, the distinctions between **repeat dispensing** and **repeat prescribing** are often misunderstood, leading to inefficiencies and compliance risks. With the rise of *electronic transmission of prescriptions* and advances in *dispensing workflow integration*, it is crucial to grasp these concepts to ensure smooth patient care, accurate forecasting, and regulatory compliance.

Understanding the Basics: Repeat Prescribing and Repeat Dispensing Defined

At first glance, both repeat prescribing and repeat dispensing relate to the process where patients receive multiple supplies of medications based on a single prescription authority. However, the roles, responsibilities, and regulatory requirements differ significantly.

Repeat Prescribing

Repeat prescribing refers to the practice where a prescriber (typically a GP) issues a prescription labelled as 'repeatable' meaning the patient can request additional supplies without needing a new prescription each time. This is common in chronic conditions requiring long-term medication. Repeat prescriptions are usually ordered by the patient or pharmacy and must be authorised anew by the prescriber for each issue.

Repeat Dispensing

Repeat dispensing is a specific service commissioned in the UK that allows a prescriber to authorise a series of dispensings (usually up to 12 months' supply) on a single prescription form. The pharmacy can then dispense specified quantities at set intervals without needing to seek renewal or authorisation from the prescriber each time.

Repeat dispensing ties into the patient's care plan more tightly and leverages pharmacy workflow integration tools to plan and fulfil medication supply over time, enhancing adherence and reducing workload.

Electronic Transmission of Prescriptions: Transforming Repeat Prescribing and Dispensing

The adoption of Electronic Prescriptions Service [robotic dispensing system for pharmacy](#) (EPS) has dramatically altered how repeat prescribing and dispensing are managed. Paper prescriptions are rapidly being replaced with electronic prescriptions transmitted directly from GP systems to pharmacies, improving efficiency and traceability.

- **For repeat prescribing:** Patients are nominated to a preferred pharmacy, and electronic repeat prescriptions can be requested directly through GP systems. This reduces errors and speeds up the process.
- **For repeat dispensing:** EPS allows the prescriber to issue a batch repeat prescription electronically, with clear dispensing instructions and schedules, which can be integrated directly into the pharmacy dispensing workflow.

This shift from paper to electronic transmission supports barcode traceability and robotic dispensing systems, which require digital workflow inputs to function optimally.

Nomination and Forecasting Demand

Nomination is the process where patients select a single pharmacy to receive their prescriptions electronically. This choice is critical for managing repeat prescribing and repeat dispensing services effectively.

Impact on Forecasting

When repeat prescriptions and repeat dispensing are transmitted electronically to a nominated pharmacy, this enables:

1. **Improved demand forecasting:** Pharmacies can analyse incoming electronic prescriptions and repeat dispensing schedules to predict stock requirements accurately.
2. **Inventory optimisation:** Ensures that the right medicines are stocked in appropriate quantities, reducing wastage and stockouts.
3. **Workflow planning:** Pharmacy staff can better schedule dispensing work around expected repeat dispensing dates, matching patient needs and staffing.

Without accurate electronic nomination and visibility into repeat prescribing/dispensing data, pharmacies risk overstocking or missing essential medication supply deadlines.

Repeat Dispensing Scheduling: Aligning Dispensing Workflow

In repeat dispensing, prescriptions come with scheduled dispensing dates and quantities. Pharmacy systems integrated with electronic repeat dispensing (eRD) data facilitate:

- **Automated alerts:** Reminding staff when a repeat dispense is due.
- **Workflow integration:** Allowing dispensary software to prioritise and batch repeat dispensing tasks efficiently.
- **Compliance checks:** Ensuring the correct interval between dispenses as per regulatory and clinical guidance.

This scheduling is not feasible with traditional repeat prescribing, as each repeat prescription is authorised separately, and timing may vary.

Robotic Dispensing and Barcode Traceability in Repeat Services

With the increasing complexity and volume of repeat dispensing, automated technologies such as robotic dispensing units and barcode scanning have become vital.



Robotic Dispensing

Robotic dispensers rely on structured electronic prescription data—especially from repeat dispensing schedules—to pre-prepare medication packs. This automates routine tasks, reduces errors, and frees staff to focus on clinical activities.

Barcode Traceability

Barcodes on medication packs and EP prescriptions support end-to-end traceability, crucial for compliance with MHRA and GPhC guidelines. Every dispense in a repeat dispensing cycle can be logged with a unique scan, creating an audit trail.

Technology Benefit to Repeat Dispensing Regulatory Requirement Electronic Prescription Service (EPS) Direct transmission of repeat dispensing prescriptions, reduces errors MHRA: Accurate labeling and dispensing records Robotic Dispensing Automates routine repackaging and dispensing GPhC: Error reduction and workflow validation Barcode Traceability Audit trail for each dispense in repeat cycles MHRA: Medicines traceability and reportability

Summary: Key Differences at a Glance

Feature	Repeat Prescribing	Repeat Dispensing Authorisation
Prescriber	authorises each repeat prescription separately	authorises a batch of dispenses on one prescription
Prescription Type	Multiple repeat prescriptions electronically or paper	Single repeat dispensing prescription with scheduled supply
Pharmacy Role	Dispense repeat prescriptions as received	Dispense multiple supplies as per authorised schedule without reauthorisation
Electronic Integration	EPS supports transmission of repeat prescriptions	EPS supports electronic repeat dispensing with workflow scheduling
Forecasting	Less predictable demand	Planned, predictable medicine supply schedule

Final Thoughts: Why Understanding This Difference Matters

Pharmacy workflows in the UK are becoming ever more sophisticated, leveraging electronic prescribing services, integrated dispensing software, and automation. Knowing the regulatory nuances and practical differences between repeat dispensing and repeat prescribing avoids the pitfall of assuming they are interchangeable.

Investing time in understanding these processes:

- Improves patient medication adherence and satisfaction.
- Enhances pharmacy inventory management and cost control.
- Ensures compliance with MHRA and GPhC requirements.
- Supports accurate audit trails through barcode traceability.
- Maximises the benefits of robotic dispensing and electronic workflow tools.

Ask yourself this: so, next time you see the phrase 'repeat prescriptions' do ask:

“Is the process repeat prescribing, or are we delivering a repeat dispensing service?”

Answering this question shapes how you design pharmacy workflows, integrate technology, and comply with UK healthcare regulations.

