

Rx for jobs: Millennium Pharmacy enters Orlando market

Plans include hiring up to 120 workers in next 2-3 years

MELANIE STAWICKIAZAM

Chicago-based Millennium Pharmacy Systems will make its Florida debut with a local office and plans to hire up to 120 new employees during the next two to three years.

Millennium's Orlando office got its pharmacy license June 17 and is leasing 10,000 square feet at 6509 Hazeltine National Drive, near Orlando International Airport. The company has 10 local employees and will add another 20 by year-end, said Tim McMahon, regional director of sales in Florida.

The new hires will include pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and administrative and shipping staff, CEO Richard Scardina said. Annual salaries will range from \$25,000 for support and administrative staff to about \$105,000 for pharmacists.



McMahon

The Orlando facility — equipped with two robotic machines — will receive, package and ship out prescription drugs to nursing homes and assisted-living facilities. Unlike hospitals, most nursing homes don't have pharmacies and contract out for the pharmacy services.

Established about eight years ago, Millennium serves 120 nursing homes with a total of 16,000 beds in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and West Virginia. It plans to expand into Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey before the end of the year, said Scardina.

Florida was an attractive state to expand into, due to its growing elderly population, Scardina said. Florida has nearly 700 nursing homes serving more than 80,000 elderly and disabled people, said the Florida Health Care Association, a Tallahassee-based group that represents nearly 500



JIM GARCHIDI

Millennium's Shailesh Patel checks pill containers in the automated tablet packaging system.

long-term care facilities. People age 65 years and older are expected to make up 26 percent of the state's population by 2025, up from 19 percent in 1995. In comparison, the national rate of people in that age group is expected to reach 19.6 percent of the U.S. population in 2030.

Millennium was listed on the Inc. 500 Fastest-Growing Companies in the United States list in 2008 and 2007. It ranked No. 284 in 2008 and No. 17 among health industry honorees.

According to Inc.'s report, Millennium grew 967.6 percent and had \$50.6 million in revenue in 2007, up from \$4.7 million in 2004. It said the company is growing because of its "efficiency and accuracy through technology." Nurses use laptops and bar code scanners to communicate with doctors and pharmacists via wireless networks, which give continually updated information about patients' histories and insurance coverage.

Millennium delivers its medications to clients by ground transportation, so it will contract with two or three local courier companies, Scardina said. Because the firm aims for three- to four-hour delivery times to any facility it serves, it also may open small satellite offices in the Miami, Panhandle and southwest Florida areas.

Scardina said he is talking with several large nursing home companies in Florida.

"We have two that are moving very aggressively now," Scardina said. "We expect to be servicing patients in less than 60 days in Florida."

The cost per year for nursing homes to use Millennium's service depends on the payer mix of Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance, and the intensity of care and number of medications a patient is on.

Millennium uses an electronic medication ordering system that dispenses prescriptions in bar-coded packages by patient and by time of day. It also checks if the medication is covered under Medicare Part D plans, and it reduces costs, human error and paperwork, Scardina said.

A few Florida nursing homes have moved to electronic reporting systems, and such a system on the pharmacy side could help in the event of a hurricane when patients may need to be evacuated elsewhere, said Kristen Knapp, spokeswoman with the Florida Health Care Association.

Electronic reporting systems also save time in coordinating patients' medications for nursing home staff, said Reuben Bowie, director of nursing at the 228-bed Health Central Park Nursing and Rehabilitation facility in Ocoee.

One issue is the paperwork involved with finding out which drugs are covered by Medicare. Bowie said Health Central Park's pharmacy service tells them what drugs aren't covered, but then her staff must ask the doctor to authorize an alternative drug.

Lena Sturgeon, executive vice president at Millennium, said her company's system automatically flags medications not paid for by Medicare and provides available drug alternatives. That can help eliminate the need for phone calls between the pharmacy service provider, nursing home and doctors.

Added Scardina, "The Florida marketplace has never seen anything like this."

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