

Health care businesses take off at airports

By Roger Yu, *USA TODAY*

Reluctant to deal with the hassles of airport security, sales executive Michael D'Souza generally packs the syringes he needs for his daily medication in a bag that he checks when he travels.

The strategy backfired for the Toronto resident recently when he needed the medication while he was stuck during a four-hour delay at Newark Liberty. D'Souza found new needles when an airport customer service rep told him about a pharmacy that opened late last year in Terminal C.

"I don't think I've ever seen a pharmacy at an airport," he says. "But I thought: What a good idea. People are traveling sick all the time."

Pharmacies and walk-in health clinics are opening at more airports in the USA, hoping to capture a sizable portion of travelers and airport employees who want access to basic primary health care and to fill their prescriptions at the last minute.

Such facilities are common at large foreign airports, but domestic airports have mostly focused on services that cater to travelers' immediate needs. Several entrepreneurs are betting that there's pent-up demand for such services at airports in the USA.

While similar to primary care physician offices, walk-in clinics generally focus on a limited range of medical services and medications. Nurse practitioners typically deliver the services.

Harmony Pharmacy, which launched at Newark Liberty late last year, will open another airport shop at the much-anticipated JetBlue Terminal 5 at New York's John F. Kennedy airport in September.

AeroClinic, which runs a walk-in clinic at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta, will open its second branch at Philadelphia International in the spring.

Solantic, which operates walk-in clinics at several Wal-Marts, will expand into the airport market by opening at Orlando International later this year. Atlanta-based AirportMD opens its first store in Miami next month, followed by another in Minneapolis in the fall.

"Airports lend themselves as an ideal market for retail-based care because (there are) a lot of people in between flights or who have downtime," says Tine Hansen-Turton, executive director of the Convenient Care Association, a trade group for retail walk-in clinics. "You also have employers who have hours not conducive to going to primary care providers."

Several factors are driving the trend:

- Greater marketing emphasis.** Airports are increasingly looking for non-aviation revenue to offset discounts and promotions given to airlines to court new flights. As a result, a greater array of services and retail shops that consumers normally don't associate with flying are starting to appear between gates, including health and wellness services.

- Longer waiting time.** Airports have always been a potentially attractive market, says Rosemary Kelly, marketing executive of AeroClinic. About 1.2 billion people traveled through the top 20 airports last year, not including the 500,000 employees who work there. "It's the largest consumer venue anywhere in the world," she says.

With more stringent security, fliers are arriving earlier, which gives them time to receive basic health services that wouldn't otherwise be feasible.

- Growth of the retail clinics industry.** Airports are a new market for an already fast-growing industry. According to the Convenient Care Association, there are about 950 clinics in the USA, and more than 500 more will open by the end of this year. Many of them are at strip malls or in big-box drugstores, but transportation hubs are seen as an attractive growth market, says Hansen-Turton.

AeroClinic says its shop at Atlanta Hartsfield focuses on 30 of the most common requests among travelers. They include ear infections, stomachaches, flu shots, antibiotics, asthma inhalers and heart medication. It also offers some preventive care for people who have more time, including diabetes monitoring, cholesterol checking and drug testing.

While they take most insurance policies, including Medicare, a distinct feature of walk-in clinics is the menu pricing rare in other doctors' offices or hospitals. At Solantic, most services fall into one of three categories. The Level 1 category – seeing a nurse practitioner and getting a prescription – costs \$59. Level 2 service – more complicated procedures, such as strep tests, EKG or injections – costs \$109. Level 3 procedures – such as stitches and X-rays – are \$169.

Harmony Pharmacy has a narrower focus on pharmaceutical products, though it has some basic primary care services delivered by nurse practitioners. It specializes in filling prescriptions and selling sundries and other travel products. It has about 1,100 types of prescription drugs, says Ken Corroon, Harmony's CEO. "People go on vacation, and they forget their heart medication or Viagra. People have varying needs."

LANDING A PLACE TO PICK UP YOUR MEDS

The following airports have or soon will open pharmacies inside their terminals.

<u>Vendor</u>	<u>Weekday hours</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Information</u>
Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta / AeroClinic	7:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m.	Main terminal atrium, third level	404-616-6000; theaeroclinic.com
Newark Liberty/ Harmony Pharmacy	8:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m.	Terminal C1, near Gate 91	973-639-9530 ; harmonypharmacy.com
Philadelphia / AeroClinic ¹	7:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m.	Between Terminals A and B	theaeroclinic.com
New York JFK/ Harmony Pharmacy ²	Undetermined	JetBlue Terminal 5	harmonypharmacy.com

1 -- opening in late May or early June; 2 -- opening in September.

Source: USA TODAY research