

The Combination Compounding and Pill Counting Prescription Scale

In the early 20th century most drugs were compounded by the pharmacist using a scale designed for compounding prescriptions. The National Committee on Weights and Measures (NCWM) saw the need for regulations to define the capabilities and characteristics of scales used for filling prescriptions by compounding. The requirements were set down in Handbook 44 and sample scales were required to be submitted for evaluation by the National Type Evaluation Program (NTEP) for approval, which took the form of a Certificate of Compliance.

Early in the 21st century there was a movement to allow the use of scales for pill counting in the pharmacy in order to help hard pressed pharmacists by reducing the time required to fill scripts. The NCWM looked into the possibility of allowing drugs sold in commerce to be sold on the basis of counting pills based upon their weight. This was allowed in 2004, primarily on the basis that the FDA maintained sufficiently tight weight tolerances on pills within a drug lot.

Now the Pharmacist can have a single scale which allows both Compounding and Pill Counting, thereby making it much more useful in filling scripts. These scales are evaluated by NTEP and must have a Certificate of Conformance approving the scale type for use in the pharmacy as a pill counter and a compounding scale.

TORBAL, has been producing pharmacy scales for over a century, and now offers a variety of NTEP approved digital combination scales. Their less expensive combination scales, the DRX-4C Series, can have a drug database capacity of 3000 NDC Codes with their associated pill sample weights. They can also do NDC Code verification with the aid of a bar code scanner. These scales have a maximum capacity of 300 grams, and a segmented LCD Display.

The DRX-5 Series, moderately more expensive, offer a 10,000 drug database which can store not only the NDC Codes and their associated pill sample weights, but also the drug name and the lot number. These scales can also do NDC Code verification with the aid of a bar code scanner, and are offered with a maximum capacity of 500 grams. The larger capacity can be very useful for large prescriptions or if the scale is used to do inventory counts. These scales are self calibrating based upon internal calibration weights, and automatically recalibrate based upon temperature changes and after fixed intervals of time. They have a graphics type of LCD display and can display onscreen instructions for the user. These scales offer pharmacy automation at very affordable prices.

The combination prescription scale and pill counter is something that every pharmacy should consider. Even those that have robotics for there high volume drugs can benefit from having a scale for those that the robot either can't or doesn't handle.