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REFRIGERATED PHARMACEUTICAL ORDER PROCESSING SYSTEMS

Abstract

A container repository for containers includes a cabinet having an interior. A container holder is disposed in the interior of the cabinet. The container holder includes a container receiver and a container dispenser. The container receiver has a container interior sized and shaped to receive and hold the containers as a stack of containers. The container dispenser is arranged to remove a bottom-most container of the stack of containers from the stack of containers. A container transporter is at least partially disposed in the interior of the cabinet. The container transporter transports the containers after the containers are removed from the stack of containers.

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Background/Summary

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS [0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 18/442,259, which was filed Feb. 15, 2024. The entire disclosure of said application is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD
[0002] The present disclosure generally relates to pharmaceutical order processing systems, and more particularly to pharmaceutical container processing systems for processing pharmaceutical containers stored in a refrigerated state.

BACKGROUND
[0003] High volume pharmacies process and fulfill a large number of prescription orders per day. These pharmacies often rely on automated systems to process, fill, and pack one or more prescriptions together for delivery to a patient. These automated systems generally fit into one of two categories: (1) systems, such as high-volume fillers, that automatically fill pharmaceutical containers (e.g., auto-filled containers) with specific quantities of pharmaceuticals; and (2) systems, such as unit-of-use systems, that process unit-of-use products or containers. A unit-of-use container contains an entire prescription of a pharmaceutical and can therefore be sent to the patient without modifying the pharmaceutical(s) (e.g., the quantity, type, etc.) in the container and without product packaging modification (or with minimal product packaging modification) except for labeling with patient information. Unit-of-use products can include a full course of medicine to be taken by a patient, for example, an entire prescription (e.g., a thirty-day supply, a sixty-day supply, or a ninety-day supply). The unit-of-use products contain known quantities of medication in packages that are closed and sealed by, for example, the pharmaceutical manufacturer.

SUMMARY
[0004] In one aspect, a container repository for containers comprises a cabinet having an interior. A container holder is disposed in the interior of the cabinet. The container holder includes a container receiver and a container dispenser. The container receiver has a container interior sized and shaped to receive and hold the containers as a stack of containers. The container dispenser is arranged to remove a bottom-most container of the stack of containers from the stack of containers. A container transporter is at least partially disposed in the interior of the cabinet. The container transporter is configured to transport the containers after the containers are removed from the stack of containers.
[0005] Other objects and features of the present disclosure will be in part apparent and in part pointed out herein.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS
[0006] FIG. **1** is a plan view of a pharmaceutical order processing system according to one embodiment of the present disclosure;
[0007] FIG. **2** is a perspective of a pharmaceutical container processing system according to one embodiment of the present disclosure;
[0008] FIG. **3** is perspective of the pharmaceutical container processing system, with an enclosure hidden from view to reveal interior details;
[0009] FIG. **4** is a perspective of a pharmaceutical container repository according to one embodiment of the present disclosure;
[0010] FIG. **5** is another perspective of the pharmaceutical container repository, with doors hidden from view to reveal interior details;
[0011] FIG. **6** is a front perspective of interior bays of the pharmaceutical container repository;

[0012] FIG. **7** is a rear perspective of the interior bays of the pharmaceutical container repository;

[0013] FIG. **8** is an enlarged, fragmentary section of the pharmaceutical container repository, with a container pusher in a starting position;

[0014] FIG. **9** is an enlarged, fragmentary section of the pharmaceutical container repository, with the container pusher in a pushed position;

[0015] FIG. **10** is a perspective of a container holder of the pharmaceutical container repository;

[0016] FIG. **11** is an enlarged, fragmentary rear perspective of the container holder;

[0017] FIG. **12** is a front perspective of a divider of the container holder;

[0018] FIG. **13** is a rear perspective of the divider;

[0019] FIG. **14** is an enlarged, fragmentary perspective of dividers of the container holder attached to a frame;

[0020] FIG. **15** is an enlarged, fragmentary front perspective of a container pusher and a container receiver of the container holder;

[0021] FIG. **16** is an enlarged, fragmentary rear perspective of the container pusher and the container receiver of the container holder;

[0022] FIG. **17**A is an enlarged, fragmentary section of the pharmaceutical container repository taken through line **17-17** in FIG. **5**, with an exit door shown in a closed position;

[0023] FIG. **17**B is the same as FIG. **17**A, except the exit door is shown in an open position;

[0024] FIG. **18** is an enlarged, fragmentary perspective of a pickup station of the pharmaceutical container repository;

[0025] FIG. **19** is an enlarged, fragmentary plan view of the pickup station; and

[0026] FIG. **20** is a schematic diagram of an example control system for the pharmaceutical container processing system.

[0027] Corresponding reference characters indicate corresponding parts throughout the drawings.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0028] Referring to FIG. **1**, a pharmaceutical order processing system according to one embodiment of the present disclosure is indicated generally by reference numeral **10**. The pharmaceutical order processing system **10** is contained within a pharmacy **12** (e.g., a generally automated pharmacy). The pharmaceutical order processing system **10** processes prescription orders received by the system. A prescription order may include one or more pharmaceuticals (e.g., prescription drugs, over the counter medication, medical tests, or other medical articles), which are contained in pharmaceutical containers C. The pharmaceutical containers C may be in the form of a bottle, a box, a package, a cylinder, flat sided container, or any other suitable container. In this embodiment, the pharmaceutical order processing system **10** is a mix system comprising both unit-of-use container systems that process pharmaceutical containers C that are generally unit-of-use products and high-volume pharmaceutical order processing system (e.g., a high-volume filler) that fills empty pharmaceutical containers C with specific quantities of pharmaceuticals. In the illustrated embodiment, the pharmaceutical order processing system **10** includes a pharmaceutical container processing system **100** (described in more detail below) for processing unit-of-use products, a high-volume filler (not shown), and corresponding conveyors **14** (e.g., conveyor belts or tracks) for conveying or moving items (e.g., pharmaceutical containers, packages, bins) about the pharmaceutical order processing system. For example, the conveyors **14** can transport bins carrying pharmaceutical containers C processed (e.g., filled) by the high-volume filler to the pharmaceutical container processing system **100** to receive or marry up with pharmaceutical containers processed by the pharmaceutical container processing system that are part of the same prescription order, before being shipped to the patient. Further details on pharmaceutical order processing systems and components thereof, including unit-of-use systems and high-volume fillers, may be found in U.S. Pat. Nos. 9,373,065, 9,697,335, 9,944,419, 9,978,036, and 10,053,248, the entities of which are hereby incorporated by reference. However, it will be appreciated that the systems and components disclosed herein can be used in other contexts without departing from the

scope of the present disclosure. For example, while embodiments described herein are directed to pharmaceutical containers C, the systems and methods of the present disclosure can dispense other temperature controlled articles, such as medical tests (e.g., COVID tests, FLU tests, and the like), food, etc.

[0029] Referring to FIGS. **2** and **3**, a pharmaceutical container processing system (e.g., pharmaceutical container processor) according to one embodiment of the present disclosure is indicated generally by reference numeral **100**. The pharmaceutical container processing system **100** may be the pharmaceutical container processing system that is part of the pharmaceutical order processing system **10** of FIG. **1**, or may be a standalone system. The pharmaceutical container processing system **100** processes prescription orders received by the system **10**. Specifically, the pharmaceutical container processing system **100** may process a select category or subset of prescription orders received by the pharmaceutical order processing system **10**, such as prescription orders comprising unit-of-use products. Accordingly, the pharmaceutical container processing system **100** comprises a unit-of-use system that processes pharmaceutical containers C that are unit-of-use products. The pharmaceutical container processing system **100** generally stores, labels, dispenses and packages the unit-of-use pharmaceutical containers C. The pharmaceutical container processing system **100** (e.g., system) processes the pharmaceutical containers C (e.g., a plurality of pharmaceutical containers) to fill prescription orders by storing, monitoring, labeling, dispensing, transporting, verifying and/or packaging the pharmaceutical containers to fill a prescription order received by the order processing system **10**.

[0030] Referring to FIGS. **1-3**, the system **100** includes at least one (e.g., two) container repositories **200**, a container transporter **102**, a labeler **104**, a packaging device **106** such as a bagger, a conveyor **108**, and/or a ramp or chute **110**. Each container repository **200** is configured to hold and store pharmaceutical containers C. The two illustrated container repositories **200** are generally identical and placed back-to-back relative to one another. The container transporter **102** is configured to grab the container C from the container repositories **200** (e.g., from the pickup location **284** described below). In the illustrated embodiment, the container transporter **102** comprises a robot such as a six-axis robotic arm, although other robots are within the scope of the present disclosure. For example, the container transporter **102** may comprise a selective-compliance-articulated robotic arm, a cylindrical robot, a delta robot, a polar coordinate robot, a vertically articulated robot, a Cartesian coordinate robot or any other suitable device. After picking up the pharmaceutical container C, the container transporter **102** transports the pharmaceutical container to the labeler **104**. The labeler **104** is configured to generate and provide a label (e.g., a patient specific label) for the pharmaceutical container C. In one embodiment, the labeler **104** may print and then present the label so that the container transporter **102** can bring the pharmaceutical container C into contact with the label. The label may include a pressure sensitive adhesive, which as a result of coming into contact with the pharmaceutical container C, causes the label to stick to the pharmaceutical container. After the label is applied to the pharmaceutical container C, the container transporter **102** either drops the pharmaceutical container on the conveyer **108** or on the chute **110**.

[0031] If the container transporter **102** drops the pharmaceutical container C on the conveyor **108**, the conveyor transports the pharmaceutical container to the packaging device **106** to package the pharmaceutical container C for shipping. In an example, an operator moves the pharmaceutical container C from the conveyor **108** to the packaging device **106**. In an example, a robot may pick the container C from the conveyor **108** and place it in a shipping container, e.g., a bag, box or cooler, or the like. In other embodiments, the packaging device **106** may receive the pharmaceutical container C directly from the conveyor **108**. The packaging device **106** (broadly, a shipping preparation device) can be any suitable device for bagging, packaging, sealing, boxing, etc., one or more containers C for shipping the containers to the patient. For example, the packaging device **106** may be a pre-formed bag bagger, a wrap seal bagger, or any other suitable device. The

packaging device **106** is configured to package or bag one or more pharmaceutical containers C in a package (e.g., bag). The packaging device **106** generally prepares the container C for shipping to the patient. This may include adding corresponding literature regarding the prescription order for packaging with the pharmaceutical container C. The literature may be in the form of a slip, sheet, pamphlet, book, and the like and may contain information (e.g., directions) related to the pharmaceuticals in the pharmaceutical container and/or other information (e.g., patient information) related to the prescription order. When packing the pharmaceutical containers C, the packaging device **106** can also pack the corresponding literature (e.g., a literature pack) for the pharmaceutical containers C in the shipping package. After, the package is shipped to the patient.

[0032] The chute **110** leads to the conveyors **14** of the order processing system **10**. If the container transporter **102** drops the pharmaceutical container C on the chute **110**, the chute guides and delivers the container to the conveyor **14**. For example, the dropped pharmaceutical container C may slide down the chute **110** and into a bin (not shown) on the conveyor **14**, which may or may not include containers from other parts of the pharmacy **10**. The conveyor **14** can then transport the bin to other locations in the pharmacy **10** for further processing.

[0033] The system **10** includes an enclosure **112** (hidden from view in FIG. **3**). The enclosure **12** defines (e.g., encloses) a processing area. In general, a portion of the container repositories **200**, the container transporter **102**, a portion of the labeler **104**, a portion of the conveyor **108**, and a portion of the chute **110** are disposed in the processing area. The enclosure **112** helps keep the processing area and components therein clean.

[0034] Referring to FIGS. **3**-**7**, the container repository **200** is configured to hold and store a supply of pharmaceutical containers C. The container repository **200** receives and holds the pharmaceutical containers C and can hold many different types of pharmaceutical containers (e.g., types of pharmaceuticals). The container repository **200** can be configured to hold pharmaceutical containers C of different shapes and of generally any size. For example, the container repository **200** can be configured for boxes of generally any shape and size. In one embodiment, the pharmaceutical containers C are manually loaded into the container repository **200** by an operator.

[0035] The container repository **200** includes a cabinet or housing **202** having an interior **204**. The interior **204** is sized and shaped to hold the supply of the pharmaceutical containers C. In one embodiment, the interior **204** is refrigerated to be able to store pharmaceutical containers C that need to be stored in refrigerated (e.g., 40° F. or below, or below freezing) state. The container repository **200** can include a refrigeration system **206** (FIG. **20**) to refrigerate the interior **204** of the cabinet **202**. The refrigeration system **206** may be generally contained within a lower position of the cabinet. The refrigeration system **206** may be a vapor-compression refrigeration system (e.g., evaporator, condenser, compressor, expansion valve) although other refrigeration systems can be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. In this embodiment, the cabinet **202**, or broadly, the container repository **200**, may be considered a refrigerator (e.g., a refrigerated container repository).

[0036] The container repository **200** includes a container holder **212** (broadly, at least one container holder) disposed in the interior **204** of the cabinet **202**. The container holder **212** holds and stores the pharmaceutical container C in the interior **204** of the cabinet **202**. In the illustrated embodiment, the interior **204** of the cabinet **202** is divided into bays **208**, which each bay including at least one container holder **212**. Broadly, the individual container holders **212** may be considered collectively as a single container holder. The cabinet **202** also includes a refill door **210** for each bay. In one embodiment, to reduce heat exchange when the door **210** is open, the container repository **200** can include a blower that creates an air curtain across the opening and/or a flexible curtain (e.g., strip curtain) covering the opening. An operator can open the door **210** to refill the container holder **212** for that particular bay **208** with pharmaceutical containers C. The cabinet **202** may include dividers **211** (e.g., dividing walls) separating the bays **208** in the interior **204**. In the illustrated embodiment, the divider **211** comprise a mesh or wire formative wall which allows air to move there through for

temperature regulation. In the illustrated embodiment, the cabinet **202** includes three bays **208**, although the cabinet can have more or fewer bays without departing from the scope of the present disclosure.

[0037] The container repository **200** includes a container transporter **214** at least partially disposed in the interior **204** of the cabinet **202**. The container transporter **214** is configured to transport the pharmaceutical containers C after the containers leave (e.g., are removed from) the container holders **212**. In particular, the container transporter **214** is arranged to receive the pharmaceutical containers C directly from the container holders **212**. In the illustrated embodiment, the container transporter **214** comprises a conveyor (e.g., an endless conveyor belt), although other types of container transporters can be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. The conveyor extends along each container holder **212**, and out through an opening **216** (FIG. **17**B) in a side wall of the cabinet **202**.

[0038] Referring to FIGS. **6-16**, the container holders **212** are each generally identical. Accordingly, one container holder **212** will now be described with the understanding the description applies to each container holder **212**. The container holder **212** includes a plurality of container receivers **218** (broadly, at least one container receiver) and a plurality of container dispensers **220** (broadly, at least one container dispenser). The container holder **212** is supported in the interior **204** of the cabinet **202** by a frame **222**.

[0039] The container receivers **218** are each generally identical. Accordingly, one container receiver **218** will now be described with the understanding the description generally applies to all container receivers. The container receiver **218** has a container interior **224** sized and shaped to receive and hold a stack of the pharmaceutical containers C (see FIGS. **6** and **10**). The container interior **224** is elongate. In general, the container receiver **218** includes a rear wall and opposite left and right side walls bounding the rear and opposite left and right sides, respectively, of the container interior **224**. The container receiver **218** also includes a bottom wall bounding the bottom of the container interior **224**. Together, the rear wall, the side walls, and the bottom wall support and hold the pharmaceutical containers C in the stack. In the illustrated embodiment, the container holder **212** includes a plurality (broadly, at least two) container dividers **226**. The container dividers **226** form the container receivers **218**. The container dividers **226** are all generally identical. In the illustrated embodiment, the pharmaceutical containers C are boxes stacked in the container holders **212**. It is understood the container holders **212** can hold other types of containers, such as bottles (e.g., the bottles stacked one on top of another (the cap of one bottle in physical contact with a bottom of an adjacent bottle)). In this case, the push surface **250** (described in more detail below) would push one bottle out at a time from the container holder **212**.

[0040] Referring to FIGS. **12-14**, each container divider **226** includes a rear wall **228** and a dividing wall **230**. The dividing wall **230** is oriented generally perpendicularly to the rear wall and extends forward from the rear wall. The container divider **226** also includes a foot or bottom wall **232** at the bottom of the dividing wall **230**. The foot **232** is oriented generally perpendicularly to the dividing wall **230**. The rear wall **228** and the foot **232** extend pass both sides of the dividing wall **230**, for reasons that will become apparent. The foot **232** may also extend pass the front (e.g., front edge) of the dividing wall **230**. The foot **232** is spaced from the lower end of the rear wall **228** thereby leaving a gap through which the pharmaceutical containers C can move through as they are dispensed. The container divider **226** includes two frame connectors or hooks **234**. The frame connectors **234** are connected to the rear wall **228** and vertically spaced apart from one another. The frame connectors **234** attach (e.g., removeably attach) the container divider **226** to the frame **222**. Preferably, the container dividers **226** are moveable or attachable to the frame **222** at set discrete increments. This ensures the container divider **226** (e.g., the dividing wall **230**) is oriented vertically when coupled to the frame **222**. If the container divider **226** was infinitely positionable on the frame **222**, the container divider would be more likely to become skewed with respect to the vertical, which can impact the ability for the stack of pharmaceutical containers C to be dispensed

by the container holder **222**. In the illustrated embodiment, each frame connector **234** includes a support bracket **236** configured to rest on a rail or support **222**A of the frame **222**. The frame connector **234** includes a tab or projection **238** extending downward from the support bracket **236**. The tab **236** is sized and shaped to fit into a corresponding recess or opening **240** of the rail **222**A. The rails **222**A includes a plurality of recesses **240** spaced apart along its length at discrete intervals. The recesses **240** define the set discrete positions the dividing wall **230** can be positioned in along the rail **222**A when the container divider **226** is coupled to the frame **222**.

[0041] When connected to the rails **222**A of the frame **222**, two adjacent container dividers **226** generally form one container receiver **218**. The rear walls **228** of the two container dividers **226** (specifically, the portions of the rear walls **228** extending toward each other from the respective dividing walls **230**) form the rear wall of the container receiver **218**, which supports the rear of the pharmaceutical containers C in the stack. Each dividing wall **230** of the two adjacent container dividers **226** forms one of the side walls of the container receiver **218**, which support the sides of the pharmaceutical containers C in the stack. Each side wall of the container receiver **218** bounds one side of the container receiver **224**. The feet **232** of the two container dividers **226** (specifically, the portions of the feet extending toward each other from the respective dividing walls **230**) generally form the bottom wall of the container receiver **218**, which supports the bottom-most pharmaceutical container C in the stack. The feet **232** extend forward of the dividing walls **230** to support pharmaceutical container C of longer lengths.

[0042] The ability to position the container dividers **226** at different positions relative to one another, along the rail **222**A, allows the container interior **224** of the container receiver **218** to be adjusted to conform a width of the container interior to pharmaceutical containers C of different widths. In general, at least one of the side walls (e.g., dividing walls **230**) of the container receiver **218** is moveable relative to the other side wall (e.g., other dividing wall) to change a width of the container interior **224** (e.g., the distance between the side walls). Specifically, the at least one side wall is moveable at the set discrete increments (relative to the other side wall), as described above. In the illustrated embodiment, it is appreciated that both side walls (e.g., dividing walls **230**) are independently moveable (e.g., moveable at the set discrete increments). This allows the width of the container interior **224** to be adjusted to fit different sizes of pharmaceutical containers C. The container dividers **226** are connectable and disconnectable to the frame **222** without the use of tools, allows an operator to easily and quickly adjust the container dividers as needed. In one embodiment, the width of the container interior **224** is about ¼ inch greater than the width of the pharmaceutical containers C held therein. This provides enough clearance to allow the pharmaceutical containers to be easily placed in the container interior **224** and move downward as containers are removed from the bottom of the stack (as described below). In one embodiment, a pair of container dividers **226** may be joined together, such as by one or more brackets extending there between (such as between the rear walls **228**). This allows the container interior **224** of the container receiver **218** to be filled with pharmaceutical containers C while the container receiver is outside the interior **204** of the cabinet **202** and then positioned in the interior of the cabinet (e.g., mounted on the rails **222**A of the frame **222**) after the loading. This may make it quicker to refill or restock the container holder **212**, over loading the container receiver when it is in the interior **204** of the cabinet **202**. In this embodiment, the distance between the dividing walls **230** (broadly, side walls of the container receiver **218**) may be fixed (e.g., cannot be changed).

[0043] Other configurations of the container receiver **218** can be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure.

[0044] Referring to FIGS. **8-11**, **15**, and **16**, the container dispensers **220** are each generally identical. Accordingly, one container dispenser **220** will now be described with the understanding the description generally applies to all container dispensers. The container dispenser **220** is associated with one of the container receivers **218**. The container dispenser **200** removes the pharmaceutical containers C one at a time from the corresponding container receiver **218**. The

container dispenser **220** is arranged to remove the bottom-most pharmaceutical container C in the stack of pharmaceutical containers from the stack of the pharmaceutical containers help by its corresponding container receiver **218**. In the illustrated embodiment, the container dispenser **220** comprises a pusher **242**, although other types of container dispensers can be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. The pusher **242** is configured to push the bottom-most pharmaceutical container C out of the stack of pharmaceutical containers held by the corresponding container receiver **218**.

[0045] The pusher **242** includes a push bracket **244** and a prime mover **246**. The prime mover **246** is operatively coupled to the push bracket **244** to move the push bracket. The prime mover **246** moves the push bracket from a first or starting position (FIGS. **8**, **15**, and **16**) to a second or pushed position (FIG. **9**). The push bracket **244** moves a linear path between the starting and pushed positions. This linear path is generally perpendicular to the container interior **224** (e.g., perpendicular to the orientation of the stack of pharmaceutical containers C). In the illustrated embodiment, the prime mover **246** is a pneumatic linear actuator, although other types of prime movers (e.g., electric linear actuator, electric motor, etc.) may be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. The push bracket **244** includes a push surface **250**. The push surface **250** is arranged to engage the bottom-most pharmaceutical container C (e.g., an end thereof) in the stack of the pharmaceutical containers held by the corresponding container receiver **218** to push the bottom-most pharmaceutical container out of the stack of pharmaceutical containers. The push surface **250** pushes the bottom-most pharmaceutical container C as the push surface is moved from the starting position toward (e.g., to) the pushed position by the prime mover **246**. As used herein, the movement of the push bracket **244** (e.g., the push surface **250**) from the starting position to the pushed position is called a push stroke and the movement of the push bracket from the pushed position to the starting position is called a return stroke. The push bracket **244** removes (e.g., pushes) the bottom-most pharmaceutical container C from the container receiver **218** during the push stroke and returns to the starting position at the end of the return stroke to be in position to remove another pharmaceutical container form the container receiver. The pusher **242** pushes the bottom-most pharmaceutical container C through the gaps between the rear walls **228** and feet **232** of the container dividers **226** (broadly, an opening at the bottom of the bottom wall of the container receiver **218**) to remove the container from the stack and move the container onto the container transport **214**. As illustrated, the container transporter **214** is arranged to receive the pharmaceutical containers C from the container holder **212** (e.g., the container receiver **218**) as the containers are removed (e.g., pushed) from the container receiver by the container dispenser **220**. The container transport **214** extends behind the container dispenser **220** and the conveyor surface (e.g., top surface of the conveyor belt) is at an elevation slightly below the lowest elevation of the feet **232**.

[0046] The push bracket **244** may also include a support surface **248**. The support surface **248** is generally planar and oriented generally perpendicular to the push surface **250**. The support surface **248** is arranged to support a subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container C (e.g., the pharmaceutical container that is second from the bottom and resting on the bottom-most pharmaceutical container) in the stack of containers as the pusher **242** pushes the bottom-most container out of the stack of containers. The support surface **248** supports the stack of pharmaceutical containers C in the container receiver **218** and prevents the stack from dropping down to the feet **232** (broadly, bottom wall of the container receiver **218**) as the bottom-most pharmaceutical container C is pushed. The support surface **248** supports the stack of pharmaceutical containers C during the push stroke (e.g., later portion thereof) and during the return stroke (e.g., an early portion thereof). During the return stroke, once the push bracket **244** (e.g., support surface **248**) clears the bottom of the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container C in the stack, the stack drops or falls down to the feet **232**. The forming subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container C is now the bottom-most pharmaceutical container C

waiting to be pushed by the pusher **242**. The push bracket **244** includes a ramp surface **252** at the end of the support surface **248** opposite the push surface **250**. The ramp surface **252** extends at an inclined angle relative to the support surface **248**. The ramp surface **252** reduces the chance of the push bracket **244** catching on the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container C (such as on a lip or edge thereof) and moving the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container with the push bracket **244** and/or damaging (e.g., ripping, tearing, opening, etc.) the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container during the return stroke.

[0047] The support surface **248** and the push surface **250** are each moveable relative to a height of the container interior **224** of the container receiver **218** to adjust the position of these surfaces along the height of the container interior. This allows the support surface **248** and the push surface **250** (broadly, the pusher **242**) to be adjusted to configure the pusher for pharmaceutical containers C of different heights. Preferably, the pusher **242** is arranged (e.g., the support surface **248** and push surface **250** moved up or down) so that the support surface **248** is just below the top of the bottom-most pharmaceutical container C when the push surface **250** engages the container. In other words, the pusher **242** is arranged so that the support surface **248** is just below a plane that is coplanar with the top of the bottom-most pharmaceutical container C. This way the pusher **242** does not push the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container C when pushing the bottom-most pharmaceutical container. In the illustrated embodiment, the push bracket **244** is connected to a push support **254** with fasteners **256** (e.g., bolts). The fasteners **256** (broadly, retainers) extend through slots in the push support **254**, allowing the push bracket **244** to be selectively moved up and down relative to the push support, by selectively tightening and loosening the fasteners. The push support **254** is mounted to a moveable carriage **256** of the prime mover **246**. The push bracket **244** includes a plate that defines the support surface **248**, one tab extending from one end of the plate defining the push surface **250** and another tab extending from the opposite end of the plate defining the ramp surface **252**. Other configurations of the pusher **242** may be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure.

[0048] The container holder **212** includes a pair (broadly, at least one) of stops **258**, **260** (e.g., return stops) for each container dispenser **220** (e.g., pusher **242**). The return stops **258**, **260** are arranged to engage the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container C in the stack of containers to inhibit the subsequent bottom-most container from moving relative to the stack of containers during the return stroke (e.g., when the push surface **250** moves from the pushed position toward the starting position). Because the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container C rest on the support surface **248** during the first portion of the return stroke, without the return stops **258**, **260**, the stack of pharmaceutical containers C would move with the push bracket **244** and fall out of the container receiver **218**. The return stops **258**, **260** are moveable and selectively fixable in position relative to the container receiver **218** (e.g., the container interior **224**). The return stops **258**, **260** are moveable in a direction parallel to the path of the push bracket **244** (e.g., toward and away from the container interior **224**). This allows the position of the return stops **258**, **268** to be changed to adjust the return stops based on the length (broadly, size) of the pharmaceutical containers C held in the container receiver **218**. In the illustrated embodiment, the returns stops **258**, **260** each comprise a fin (e.g., stop wall) **262** that can extend up through the gap between the two feet **232**. The fins **262** are tall enough to engage the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container C when the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container is supported by the support surface **248**. In the illustrated embodiment, the fin **262** of the first return stop **258** is mounted on a base **264** (which also supports the prime mover **246**) with fasteners (not shown). The fasteners (broadly, retainers) extend through slots (FIG. **15**) in the first return stop **258** and into openings in the base. The slots allow the first return stop **258** to be moved toward and away from the container interior **224** of the container receiver **218** as needed, by selectively tightening and loosening the fasteners. Somewhat similarly, the fin **262** of the second return stop **260** is also mounted to the base **264**. Fasteners (not shown) (broadly, retainers) extend through a

slot (FIG. **16**) in the base **264** and into openings in the fin **262** of the second return stop **260**. The slot in the base **264** allow the second return stop **260** to be moved toward and away from the container interior **224** of the container receiver **218** as needed, by selectively tightening and loosening the fasteners. Other configurations of the return stops **258**, **260** may be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. In operation, one or both of the return stops **258**, **260** may be used. Further, a return stop **258**, **260** not being used can be removed from the container holder **212**. In one example, an operator may choose to use only one of the return stops **258**, **260** for pharmaceutical containers of smaller widths and both returns stops for pharmaceutical containers of larger widths. It has been found that using both return stops **258**, **260** prevents the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container C (broadly, the entire stack) from twisting in the container interior **224** during the return stroke, which could otherwise implead subsequent dispensing of the containers.

[0049] Referring to FIGS. **11** and **16**, the container holder **212** also includes a pair (broadly, at least one) of stops **266** (e.g., push stops) for each container dispenser **220**/container receiver **218** (e.g., pusher **242**). The push stops **266** are arranged to engage the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container C in the stack of containers to inhibit the subsequent bottom-most container from moving with the bottom-most pharmaceutical container during the push stroke (e.g., when the bottom-most container is removed from the stack of containers). Because the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container C rest on top of the bottom-most pharmaceutical container during a portion of the push stroke, without the push stops **266**, the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container would move with the push bracket **244** and out of the container receiver **218**. In general, the rear wall of the container receiver **218** prevents the entire stack from moving with the bottom-most pharmaceutical container C. The push stops **266** are moveable and selectively fixable in position relative to the bottom wall (e.g., feet **232**) of the container receiver **218** (e.g., the bottom of the container interior **224**). The return stops **266** are moveable in a direction parallel to the height of the container interior **224** (e.g., toward and away from the feet **232**). This allows the position of the push stops **260** to be changed to adjust the push stops based on the height (broadly, size) of the pharmaceutical containers C held in the container receiver **218**. In the illustrated embodiment, the push stops **266** each comprise a stop wall **268** that extends down from the rear walls **228** of one of the container dividers **226**. The stop walls **268** extend down far enough to overlap the subsequent bottom-most pharmaceutical container C. In the illustrated embodiment, each stop wall **268** is mounted to the rear wall **228** of a container divider with one or more cam levers **270** (broadly, retainers). The shaft of the cam lever(s) **270** extend through a slot in the stop wall **268**. The slot allows the push stop **266** (e.g., stop wall **268**) to be moved up and down as needed, by selectively tightening and loosening the cam lever(s) **270**. Other configurations of the push stop **266** may be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. In operation, one or both of the push stops **266** may be used.

[0050] Referring to FIGS. **8**-**10**, **15**, and **16**, the container dispenser **220** is supported by the frame **222**. In particular, the base **264** of the container dispenser **220** is mounted to a rail or support **222B** of the frame. Preferably, the container dispenser **220** is moveable and selectively positionable along the rail **222B** of the frame **222**. This allows the container dispenser **220** (e.g., pusher **242**) to be aligned with its corresponding container receiver **218**. Specifically, this allows the container dispenser **220** (e.g., pusher **242**) to be center between the side walls of the container receiver **218**. As mentioned above, the container dividers **226** are mountable at different lateral positions along the frame **222**. Thus, the container dispenser **220** is also mountable at different lateral positions along the frame **222**, to be able to match the container dividers. In other words, the container dispenser **220** is moveable relative to the container interior **224** of its associated container receiver **218** in a direction that is parallel to the width of the pharmaceutical container C (e.g., width of the container interior). In the illustrated embodiment, the container dispenser is infinitely positionable along the rail **222B**. The rail **222B** includes t-slots and the container dispenser **220** include fasteners

272 (broadly, retainers) extending through the base **264** into one of the t-slots. The fasteners **272** are secured in the t-slots with nuts (disposed in the t-slots). The fasteners **272** allow the container dispenser **220** to be selectively moved back and forth along the rail **222**B, by selectively tightening and loosening the fasteners **272**.

[0051] Referring to FIGS. **8** and **9**, the container receiver **218** is arranged to hold the stack of pharmaceutical containers C at a non-zero angle α relative to the vertical (e.g., a vertical axis). Thus, as illustrated, in frame **222** supports the container holder **212** in a titled configuration. The tilt results in the pharmaceutical containers C being biased against the rear wall of the container receiver **218** due to gravity. This helps ensure the pharmaceutical containers C remain in the container interior **224** when the pharmaceutical containers drop down in the container receiver after the bottom-most pharmaceutical container has been removed. This also allows the front of the container interior **224** to remain unobstructed, allowing for easier and quicker refilling of the container interior with packages. If the container receiver was arranged to hold the stack of pharmaceutical containers vertically, some containers may fall out of the container interior when dropping down and/or some sort of barrier (which would slow down reloading time) would be required to extend over the front of the container interior to keep the containers in the container receiver. Preferably, the non-zero angle α is within the inclusive range of about 10 degrees to about 15 degrees (±5 degrees). The non-zero angle α is large enough to ensure the pharmaceutical containers C will not fall out of the container receiver **218** when dropping down but shallow enough to minimize the ride up effect of the bottom-most pharmaceutical container C—e.g., the act of the bottom-most pharmaceutical container rising up as it rides across the conveyor **214** when being pushed. This could cause a pharmaceutical container to bind against the bottom of the push stops **266**, especially for containers of longer lengths (and shorter heights), as the container is pushed, potentially damaging the container or preventing the container from being dispensed. It has been found that a non-zero angle α is within the inclusive range of about 10 degrees to about 15 degrees best balances these factors.

[0052] Referring to FIGS. **11** and **16**, the container holder **212** may include a container sensor **273** associated with each container receiver **218**. Each container sensor **273** is arranged to detect the presence or absence of a pharmaceutical container C at the bottom of the container interior **224** (e.g., bottom of the stack). The container sensors **273** can be any suitable sensors for detecting the presence and absence of a pharmaceutical container C such as a photoelectric sensor or ultrasonic sensor. Each container sensor **273** can be used to signal or detect when the container receiver **218** is empty of pharmaceutical containers C. For example, an alert can be activated and/or sent to an operator (by the control system **400** described below) when a container sensor **273** determines its corresponding container receiver **218** is empty so that the operator knows to refill the container receiver with additional pharmaceutical containers.

[0053] In one embodiment, the container repository **200** may include one or more temperature sensors **275** (FIG. **20**) arranged in the interior **204** of the cabinet **202** for monitoring the temperature of the interior. The one or more temperature sensors **275** can be spread out around the interior **204** of the cabinet **202**. In one embodiment, the refrigeration system **206** can be selectively turned on and off based on the temperature sensed by the temperature sensors **275**. For example, the refrigeration system **206** can be turned on to cool the interior **204** of the cabinet **202** if the temperature in the interior exceeds a max threshold temperature, and operate until the interior is cooled to a desired set point temperature (e.g., 40° F.). In one embodiment, the container repository **200** includes an electronically operated lock **277** (FIG. **20**) for each door **210**. The container repository **200** (e.g., the control system **400** thereof described below) can monitory the temperature of the interior **204** of the cabinet **202** using the temperature sensors **275** and close the locks **277** to prevent the doors **210** from being opened if the temperature in the interior exceeds the max threshold temperature. This way, the doors **210** remain closed (to prevent heat exchange between the interior **204** and ambient environment) while the refrigeration system **206** is operating to cool

down the interior **204** of the cabinet **202** back to the set point temperature. The locks **277** can be opened once the set point temperature is reached, thereby allowing an operator to open the doors **210** when needed to refill the container holders **212**.

[0054] Referring to FIGS. **4**-**7** and **17**A-**19**, the container transporter **214** receives the pharmaceutical containers C from the container holder(s) **212** and transports the pharmaceutical containers out of the cabinet **202** by moving the pharmaceutical containers through the opening **216** in the side wall (FIG. **17**B). The cabinet **202** may include a dispensing door **274** moveable between open and closed positions. In the open position (FIG. **17**B), the opening **216** is open and pharmaceutical containers C can move there through. In the closed position (FIG. **17**A), the door **274** blocks the opening **216**. A door prime mover **276** is operatively connected to the door **274** to move (e.g., pivot) the door between the open and closed positions. The door prime mover **276** may be a pneumatic linear actuator or any other suitable device. In the illustrated embodiment, the door **274** pivots upward, about a hinge (broadly, pivot connection) from the closed position to the open position. Other configurations of the door may be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure.

[0055] The container transporter **214** extends out from the cabinet **202**, through the opening **216** in the side wall. The container repository **200** may include a tunnel **278** covering the portion of the container transporter **214** (e.g., conveyor) extending out of the cabinet **202**. The tunnel **278** encloses the area above this portion of the container transporter. The tunnel **278** extends from the side wall of the cabinet. In one embodiment, the tunnel **278** has a length of at least 1 foot. Unexpectedly and surprisingly, it has been found that having the tunnel **278** reduces the amount of heat exchange between the interior **204** of the cabinet **202** and the environment surrounding the cabinet through the opening **216** (when the door **274** is in the open position). This is particularly important when the interior **204** of the cabinet **202** is refrigerated. Accordingly, the tunnel **278** prevents the temperature of the interior **204** of the cabinet **202** from significantly raising (e.g., warming to a temperature that is not safe to store the pharmaceutical containers in) when the door **274** is in the open position. It has been found that the addition of the tunnel **278** allows the door **274** to remain in the open position for an extended period of time (e.g., 5 minutes) with the temperature of the interior **204** of the cabinet **202** remaining at safe levels without having to run the refrigeration system **206** excessively to compensate for the heat loss (or require a refrigeration system with a larger cooling capacity to compensate for the heat loss). The refrigeration system **206** is able to run normally as if the door **274** was in the closed position. Alternatively or additionally, other ways of reducing heat exchange through the opening **216** can used, such a blower that creates an air curtain across the opening and/or a flexible curtain (e.g., strip curtain). In an example, the door **274** is in the open position during a run of dispensing multiple pharmaceutical containers C from the interior **204** of the cabinet **202**. In an example embodiment, the door **274** will only be in the open position for the time required for the pharmaceutical container C to move through the opening **216** and clear the door, no more than about 15-20 seconds. In the illustrated embodiment, the tunnel **278** comprises opposite vertical side walls and a horizontal top wall extending between the side walls. Other configurations of the tunnel may be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure.

[0056] In one embodiment, the container repository **200** includes a first or opening container sensor **280** upstream of the opening **216** and a second or closing container sensor **282** downstream of the opening. The container sensors **280**, **282** detect the presence or absence of the pharmaceutical container C as the container is moved along by the container transporter **214**. The container sensors **280** can be any suitable sensors for detecting the presence and absence of a pharmaceutical container C such as a photoelectric sensor or ultrasonic sensor. The container sensors **280**, **282** can be used to signal when the door **274** should be moved between the opening and closed positions. For example, the door **274** can move to the open position in response to the first container sensor **280** detecting a pharmaceutical container C and be moved back to the closed position in response to

the second container sensor **282** detecting the pharmaceutical container C (or in response to the second container no longer detecting the presence of the pharmaceutical container).

[0057] The container transporter **214** (e.g., conveyor) is configured to transport the pharmaceutical containers C to a set or pickup location **284** (FIG. **19**). The container transporter **102** is configured to remove the pharmaceutical container C from the pickup location. Having a pickup location prevents the container transporter **102** (or some other device) from having to determine the location of the pharmaceutical container C about to be picked up. Instead, the container transporter **102** can always return to the same location to pickup the pharmaceutical containers C. The container repository **200** includes a container locator **286** defining the pickup location. The container locator **286** forms a corner or pocket. When the pharmaceutical container C (e.g., a corner thereof) is in the corner of the container locator **286**, then the pharmaceutical container is in the pickup location **284**. In the illustrated embodiment, the container locator **286** includes a cross-rail **288** and a side rail **290**. The cross-rail **288** extends across the conveyor belt and prevents the pharmaceutical container C from continuing to move with the conveyor belt. The side rail **290** extends along one side of the conveyor belt. The cross-rail **288** is oriented generally perpendicularly to the side rail **290**. Together the cross-rail **288** and the side rail **290** form the corner of the container locator **286**. The container transporter **214** supports the pharmaceutical containers C in the pickup location. Specifically, the pharmaceutical containers C rest on the conveyor belt in the pickup location (the conveyor belt may slide under the containers in the pickup location). It is appreciated that the arrangement of the container holder(s) **212** and the manner in which the pharmaceutical containers C are moved to the container transporter **214** results in the pharmaceutical containers being in a position suitable for nesting with the corner of the container locator **286** (e.g., the length and width of the pharmaceutical container are generally parallel to the width and length, respectively, of the conveyor belt). However, the pharmaceutical containers C may generally be at any position, widthwise, on the conveyor belt when dispensed to the conveyor by the container dispenser **220**. Accordingly, the container repository **200** may include a container positioner **292** configured to position the pharmaceutical containers C in the pickup location **284**. In the illustrated embodiment, the container positioner **292** is a pusher arranged to push the pharmaceutical containers C against the side rail **290**. Thus, the combined operation of the conveyor moving the pharmaceutical containers C toward and against the cross-rail **288** and the container positioner **292** moving the pharmaceutical containers toward and against the side rail **290** moves the pharmaceutical containers into the corner of the container locator **286**, and therefore into the pickup location **284**. The container positioner **292** will generally move (e.g., engage) pharmaceutical containers C one at a time. In the illustrated embodiment, the container positioner **292** includes a push plate **294** defining a push surface **296** for pushing the pharmaceutical containers C against the side rail **290**. The push plate **294** is operatively connected to a prime mover **298** (e.g., positioner prime mover) of the container positioner **292**. In the illustrated embodiment, the prime mover **298** is a pneumatic linear actuator, although other types of prime movers (e.g., electric linear actuator, electric motor, etc.) may be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. In operation, the positioner prime mover **298** extends the push plate **294** from a home position (FIGS. **18** and **19**) toward the side rail **290** to push the pharmaceutical container C against the side rail and then retracts the push plate **294** back to the home position. This may occur before or after the pharmaceutical container C contacts the cross-rail **288**.

[0058] Still referring to FIGS. **18** and **19**, the container repository **200** can includes a sensor array **300** configured to determine or detect the height, width, and/or length (broadly, a dimension or dimensions) of the pharmaceutical containers C when the pharmaceutical containers are in the pickup location **284**. The sensor array **300** includes at least one container sensor **302** (e.g., container dimension sensor) arranged to detect the height, width, or length of the pharmaceutical containers C when the pharmaceutical containers are in the pickup location **284**. The sensor array **300** includes a height container sensor **302**A arranged to detect the height of the pharmaceutical

container C in the pickup location **284**. The height container sensor **302**A overlies the pickup location **284** and faces downward toward the pickup location. The sensor array **300** includes a length container sensor **302**B arranged to detect the length of the pharmaceutical container C in the pickup location **284**. Due to the orientation the container holders **212** dispense the pharmaceutical containers C onto the container transporter **214**, the length of the pharmaceutical containers C is oriented generally perpendicularly to the travel direction of the container transporter (likewise the width of the pharmaceutical container is oriented generally parallel to the travel direction). The length container sensor **302**B is disposed just upstream of the cross-rail **288**. The sensor array **300** includes a width container sensor **302**C arranged to detect the width of the pharmaceutical container C in the pickup location **284**. The width container sensor **302**C is offset (e.g., laterally or horizontally offset) from the container transporter **214** and is oriented at (e.g., a sensor beam thereof is oriented at) an a known or set angle to the travel direction of the container transporter (e.g., oriented at an angle to the width of the pharmaceutical container). This configuration allows the pharmaceutical container C to move toward the pickup location **284** without being blocked by the width container sensor **302**C. Using basic trigonometry using the known angle of orientation of the width container sensor **302**C and the distance measured by the width container sensor, the width of the pharmaceutical container C can be determined. The length container sensor **302**B is disposed just upstream of the pickup location **284** and is arranged to face the pickup location (through a gap or opening in the side rail **290**). In one embodiment, the container sensors **302** are laser sensors suitable for measuring a distance, although other types of sensors may be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure.

[0059] Using the sensor array **300** (e.g., container dimension sensors **302**) to find the dimensions (e.g., height, length, width) of the pharmaceutical container C in the pickup location **284** can be used to confirm the correct pharmaceutical container has been dispensed by the container repository **200**. For example, the dimensions of the pharmaceutical container C determined by the sensor array **300** can be compared to baseline dimensions of the pharmaceutical container C (stored in a database). If the dimensions match or are within an acceptable variation (e.g., ±5%) of the baseline dimensions, then the container repository has confirmed the correct pharmaceutical container C has been dispensed. Further, based on the determined dimensions, the container transporter **102** can be operated to effectively remove the pharmaceutical container from the pickup location **284**. For example, it can be determined where the container transporter **102** (e.g., a suction gripper thereof) should pick up the pharmaceutical container (e.g., a center thereof) based on the determined dimensions.

[0060] The sensor array **300** may also include a container position sensor **304** arranged to detect whether or not the pharmaceutical container C is in the pickup location **284**. In the illustrated embodiment, the container position sensor **304** comprises beam-break sensors arranged such that a beam (e.g., light beam) extends through the pickup location **284** at the corner formed by the container locator **286** (e.g., as close to the corner as possible). When the corner of the pharmaceutical container C is nested with the corner of the container locator **286**, the corner of the pharmaceutical container breaks or interrupts the beam, thereby indicating that the pharmaceutical container is in the pickup location. The beam may extend through gaps or openings in the cross-rail **288** and/or side rail **290**. Other types of sensors may be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure.

[0061] Referring to FIG. **20**, an example control system (e.g. pharmaceutical container processing system control system) of the pharmaceutical container processing system **100** is generally indicated by reference numeral **400**. The control system **400** includes a controller **402** (broadly, a computer) for controlling and operating the pharmaceutical container processing system **100** and its components. The controller **402** includes a CPU or processor **404** (e.g., a pharmaceutical container processing system processor) and RAM or memory **406** (broadly, non-transitory computer readable storage medium). The controller **402** directs (e.g., controls and operates) the various components

(e.g., the container repositories **200**, the container transporter **102**, the labeler **104**, the packaging device **106**, and the conveyor **108**) and sub-components (e.g., prime movers **246**, **276**, **298**, etc.) thereof. Broadly, the memory **406** includes (e.g., stores) processor-executable instructions for controlling the operation of the pharmaceutical container processing system **100** and the components thereof. The instructions embody one or more functional aspects of the pharmaceutical container processing system **100** and components thereof (as described herein), with the processor **402** executing the instructions to perform said one or more functional aspects. The components of the pharmaceutical container processing system **100** may be in wired or wireless communication with the controller **402**. The controller **402** may be a dedicated controller for the pharmaceutical container processing system **100** (as illustrated) that is in communication with a control system of the pharmacy **12**, part of the control system of the pharmacy, or a dedicated controller for just the container repository **200** that is in communication with a control system of the pharmaceutical container processing system **100**. Other configurations of the control system **400** may be used without departing from the scope of the present disclosure.

[0062] The controller **402** is communicatively coupled to the various components of the pharmaceutical container processing system **100** to control and/or operate these components. The controller **402** is configured to receive a prescription order for a patient and to direct (e.g., operate), as described herein, the pharmaceutical container processing system **100** to fulfill the prescription order (e.g., prepare a package for shipping containing the one or more pharmaceutical containers C that the prescription order calls for). For example, the controller **402** can operate the appropriate prime mover **246** of the container holder(s) **212** to dispense the appropriate pharmaceutical container C (based on the received prescription order) onto the container transporter **214**. The controller **402** can then operate the container transporter **214** to move the dispensed pharmaceutical container C toward the pickup location **284**. The controller **402** can operate the door prime mover **276** to open and close the door **274** to permit the dispensed pharmaceutical container C to be carried toward the pickup location **284**. The controller **402** can also operate the positioner prime mover **298** to move the dispensed pharmaceutical container C into the pickup location **284**. The controller **402** can then operate the container transporter **102** to remove the dispensed pharmaceutical container C from the pickup location **284**. The controller **402** may also provide information (e.g., patient name, prescription information, etc.) to the labeler **104** for the creation of the label for the pharmaceutical container C. Other types of information can also be shared between the controller **402** and the components of the pharmaceutical container processing system **100**. Accordingly, it is understood the controller **402** directs the components of the pharmaceutical container processing system **100** as necessary to perform the functions described herein.

[0063] In an example, the present system can be used to dispense controlled substances in the containers C. The cabinet or housing **202** of container repository **200** can include a refill door **210** that are secured by a lock, which may be electronically operable by the controller **402** or a mechanically by key. When the refill doors are locked, access by a person to the containers C within the housing **202** is prevented. Even while the refill doors are locked, the system can operate to dispense the containers C through the dispensing door **274**. The dispensing door **274** is normally closed to prevent access to the interior of the housing **202**. The dispensing door **274** is positioned such that a person cannot reach through the dispensing door **274** and reach into the container holder **212**. The access portion of the container holder **212** is opposite container transporter **214** and the remote from the dispensing door **274**. The container holder **212** and positioning of the dispensing door **274** assist in preventing access to the containers C.

[0064] Although described in connection with an example computing system environment, embodiments of the aspects of the disclosure are operational with numerous other general purpose or special purpose computing system environments or configurations. The computing system environment is not intended to suggest any limitation as to the scope of use or functionality of any aspect of the disclosure. Moreover, the computing system environment should not be interpreted as

having any dependency or requirement relating to any one or combination of components illustrated in the example operating environment. Examples of well-known computing systems, environments, and/or configurations that may be suitable for use with aspects of the disclosure include, but are not limited to, personal computers, server computers, hand-held or laptop devices, multiprocessor systems, microprocessor-based systems, set top boxes, programmable consumer electronics, mobile telephones, network PCs, minicomputers, mainframe computers, distributed computing environments that include any of the above systems or devices, and the like.

[0065] Embodiments of the aspects of the disclosure may be described in the general context of data and/or processor-executable instructions, such as program modules, stored one or more tangible, non-transitory storage media and executed by one or more processors or other devices. Generally, program modules include, but are not limited to, routines, programs, objects, components, and data structures that perform particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types. Aspects of the disclosure may also be practiced in distributed computing environments where tasks are performed by remote processing devices that are linked through a communications network. In a distributed computing environment, program modules may be located in both local and remote storage media including memory storage devices.

[0066] In operation, processors, computers and/or servers may execute the processor-executable instructions (e.g., software, firmware, and/or hardware) such as those illustrated herein to implement aspects of the disclosure.

[0067] Embodiments of the aspects of the disclosure may be implemented with processor-executable instructions. The processor-executable instructions may be organized into one or more processor-executable components or modules on a tangible processor readable storage medium. Aspects of the disclosure may be implemented with any number and organization of such components or modules. For example, aspects of the disclosure are not limited to the specific processor-executable instructions or the specific components or modules illustrated in the figures and described herein. Other embodiments of the aspects of the disclosure may include different processor-executable instructions or components having more or less functionality than illustrated and described herein.

[0068] The order of execution or performance of the operations in embodiments of the aspects of the disclosure illustrated and described herein is not essential, unless otherwise specified. That is, the operations may be performed in any order, unless otherwise specified, and embodiments of the aspects of the disclosure may include additional or fewer operations than those disclosed herein. For example, it is contemplated that executing or performing a particular operation before, contemporaneously with, or after another operation is within the scope of aspects of the disclosure.

[0069] It is apparent that the elements, features, and/or teachings set forth in each embodiment disclosed herein are not limited to the specific embodiment(s) the elements, features and/or teachings are described in. Accordingly, it is understood that the elements, features and/or teachings described in one embodiment may be applied to one or more of the other embodiments disclosed herein, even if said elements, features and/or teachings where not described herein as being a part of said one or more of the other embodiments.

[0070] The Title, Field, and Background are provided to help the reader quickly ascertain the nature of the technical disclosure. They are submitted with the understanding that they will not be used to interpret or limit the scope or meaning of the claims. They are provided to introduce a selection of concepts in simplified form that are further described in the Detailed Description. The Title, Field, and Background are not intended to identify key features or essential features of the claimed subject matter, nor is it intended to be used as an aid in determining the claimed subject matter.

[0071] When introducing elements of aspects of the disclosure or the embodiments thereof, the articles "a," "an," "the," and "said" are intended to mean that there are one or more of the elements. The terms "comprising," "including," and "having" are intended to be inclusive and mean that

there may be additional elements other than the listed elements.

[0072] In view of the above, it will be seen that several advantages of the aspects of the disclosure are achieved and other advantageous results attained.

[0073] Not all of the depicted components illustrated or described may be required. In addition, some implementations and embodiments may include additional components. Variations in the arrangement and type of the components may be made without departing from the spirit or scope of the claims as set forth herein. Additional, different or fewer components may be provided and components may be combined. Alternatively or in addition, a component may be implemented by several components.

[0074] The above description illustrates the aspects of the disclosure by way of example and not by way of limitation. This description enables one skilled in the art to make and use the aspects of the disclosure, and describes several embodiments, adaptations, variations, alternatives and uses of the aspects of the disclosure, including what is presently believed to be the best mode of carrying out the aspects of the disclosure. Additionally, it is to be understood that the aspects of the disclosure is not limited in its application to the details of construction and the arrangement of components set forth in the description or illustrated in the drawings. The aspects of the disclosure are capable of other embodiments and of being practiced or carried out in various ways. Also, it will be understood that the phraseology and terminology used herein is for the purpose of description and should not be regarded as limiting.

[0075] Having described aspects of the disclosure in detail, it will be apparent that modifications and variations are possible without departing from the scope of aspects of the disclosure as defined in the appended claims. It is contemplated that various changes could be made in the above constructions, products, and methods without departing from the scope of aspects of the disclosure. In the preceding specification, various embodiments have been described with reference to the accompanying drawings. It will, however, be evident that various modifications and changes may be made thereto, and additional embodiments may be implemented, without departing from the broader scope of the aspects of the disclosure as set forth in the claims that follow. The specification and drawings are accordingly to be regarded in an illustrative rather than restrictive sense.

Claims

1. A container repository for containers, the container repository comprising: a cabinet having an interior; a container holder disposed in the interior of the cabinet, the container holder including: a container receiver having a container interior sized and shaped to receive and hold the containers as a stack of containers; and a container dispenser arranged to remove a bottom-most container of the stack of containers from the stack of containers; and a container transporter partially disposed in the interior of the cabinet, the container transporter extending out of the cabinet, the container transporter being configured to receive the containers in the interior of the cabinet and to transport the containers outside of the cabinet after the containers are removed from the stack of containers.

2. The container repository of claim 1, wherein the container dispenser comprises a pusher configured to push the bottom-most container out of the stack of containers.

3. The container repository of claim 2, wherein the pusher includes a support surface arranged to support a subsequent bottom-most container in the stack of containers as the pusher pushes the bottom-most container out of the stack of containers.

4. The container repository of claim 3, wherein the support surface of the pusher is moveable relative to a height of the container interior of the container receiver to adjust the position of the support surface along the height of the container interior.

5. The container repository of claim 2, wherein the pusher includes a push surface arranged to engage the bottom-most container in the stack of containers to push the bottom-most container out

of the stack of containers, the push surface being moveable relative to a height of the container interior of the container receiver to adjust the position of the push surface along the height of the container interior.

6. The container repository of claim 1, wherein the container holder includes a first stop arranged to engage a subsequent bottom-most container in the stack of containers to inhibit the subsequent bottom-most container from moving with the bottom-most container as the bottom-most container is removed from the stack of containers.

7. The container repository of claim 6, wherein the container dispenser comprises a pusher having a push surface moveable between a starting position and a pushed position, the push surface being configured to push the bottom-most container out of the stack of containers as the push surface moves from the starting position toward the pushed position, and wherein the container holder includes a second stop arranged to engage the subsequent bottom-most container in the stack of containers to inhibit the subsequent bottom-most container from moving relative to the stack of containers when the push surface moves from the pushed position toward the starting position.

8. The container repository of claim 1, wherein the container receiver is arranged to hold the stack of containers at a non-zero angle relative to the vertical.

9. The container repository of claim 8, wherein the non-zero angle is within the inclusive range of about 10 degrees to about 15 degrees.

10. The container repository of claim 1, wherein the container holder includes a first side wall bounding a first side of the container interior of the container receiver and a second side wall bounding an opposite second side of the container interior, the first side wall being moveable relative to the second side wall to change a width of the container interior.

11. The container repository of claim 10, wherein the first side wall is moveable at set discrete increments relative to the second side wall to change the width of the container interior.

12. The container repository of claim 10, wherein the container dispenser comprises a pusher configured to push the bottom-most container out of the stack of containers, the pusher being moveable relative to the container interior of the container receiver in a direction parallel to the width of the container.

13. The container repository of claim 1, wherein the container transporter is arranged to receive the containers from the container holder as the containers are removed from the container receiver by the container dispenser.

14. The container repository of claim 13, wherein the container transporter comprises a conveyor.

15. The container repository of claim 14, wherein the conveyor is configured to transport the containers toward a set location, the conveyor arranged to support the containers in the set location, and wherein the container repository further comprises a container positioner configured to position the containers in the set location.

16. The container repository of claim 15 further comprising a container locator defining the set location, the container locator configured to retain the containers in the set location.

17. The container repository of claim 15, in combination with: a labeler configured to supply a label for the containers; and a second container transporter configured to remove the containers from the set location and transport the containers to the labeler.

18. The container repository of claim 1, further comprising a tunnel covering the portion of the container transporter extending out of the cabinet.

19. The container repository of claim 18, further comprising a refrigeration system configured to refrigerate the interior of the cabinet.

20. The container repository of claim 1, further comprising a door and a prime mover operatively coupled to the door to move the door between an open position to permit containers to exit the interior of the cabinet as the containers are transported by the container transporter and a closed position.