



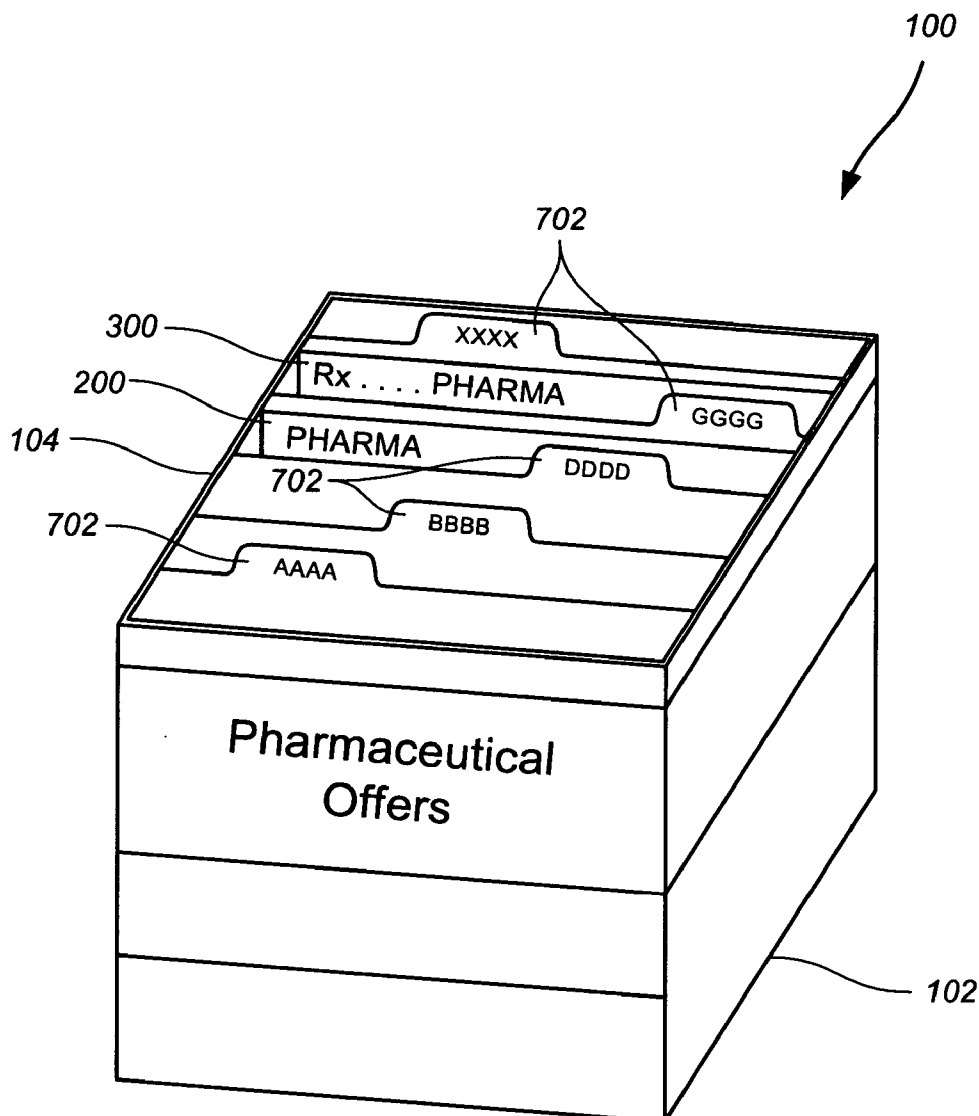
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(19) **United States**(12) **Patent Application Publication**  
**Bynum**(10) **Pub. No.: US 2006/0219590 A1**(43) **Pub. Date: Oct. 5, 2006**(54) **PHARMACEUTICAL OFFER DISTRIBUTION  
SYSTEMS, AND METHODS FOR  
DISTRIBUTING AND USING SAME**(52) **U.S. Cl. .... 206/425**(76) **Inventor: Robert L. Bynum, Sturgeon, MO (US)**(57) **ABSTRACT**

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In one embodiment, a pharmaceutical offer distribution system includes a plurality of pharmaceutical offer cards and a dispensing unit. Each of the plurality of pharmaceutical offer cards has an edge that implements a standardized relief pattern. The dispensing unit holds the plurality of pharmaceutical offer cards. The dispensing unit has a surface that is configured to mate with the standardized relief pattern of the pharmaceutical offer cards, to thereby retain the pharmaceutical offer cards until they are distributed to patients. Other pharmaceutical offer distribution systems, and methods for distributing and using same, are also disclosed.



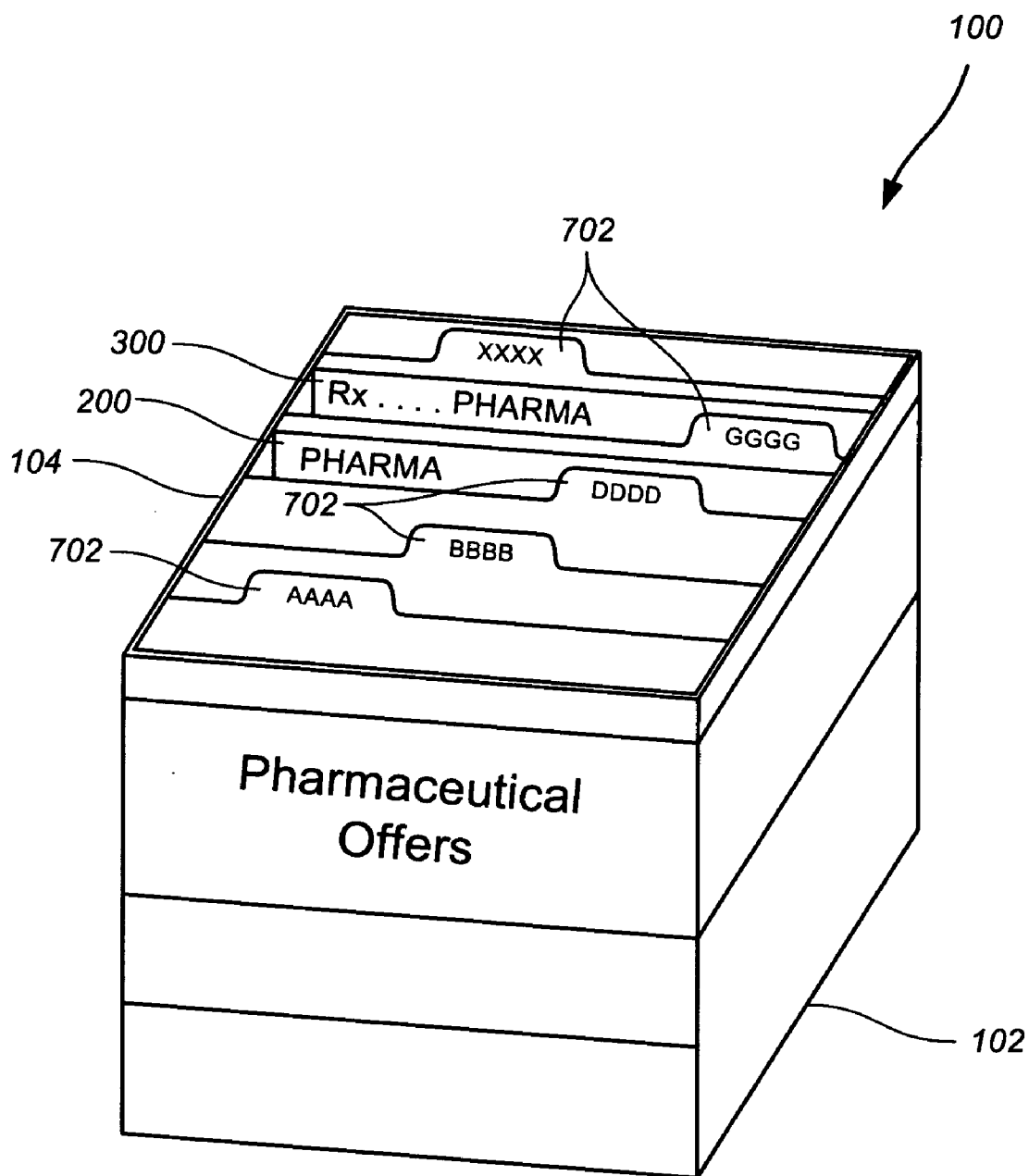
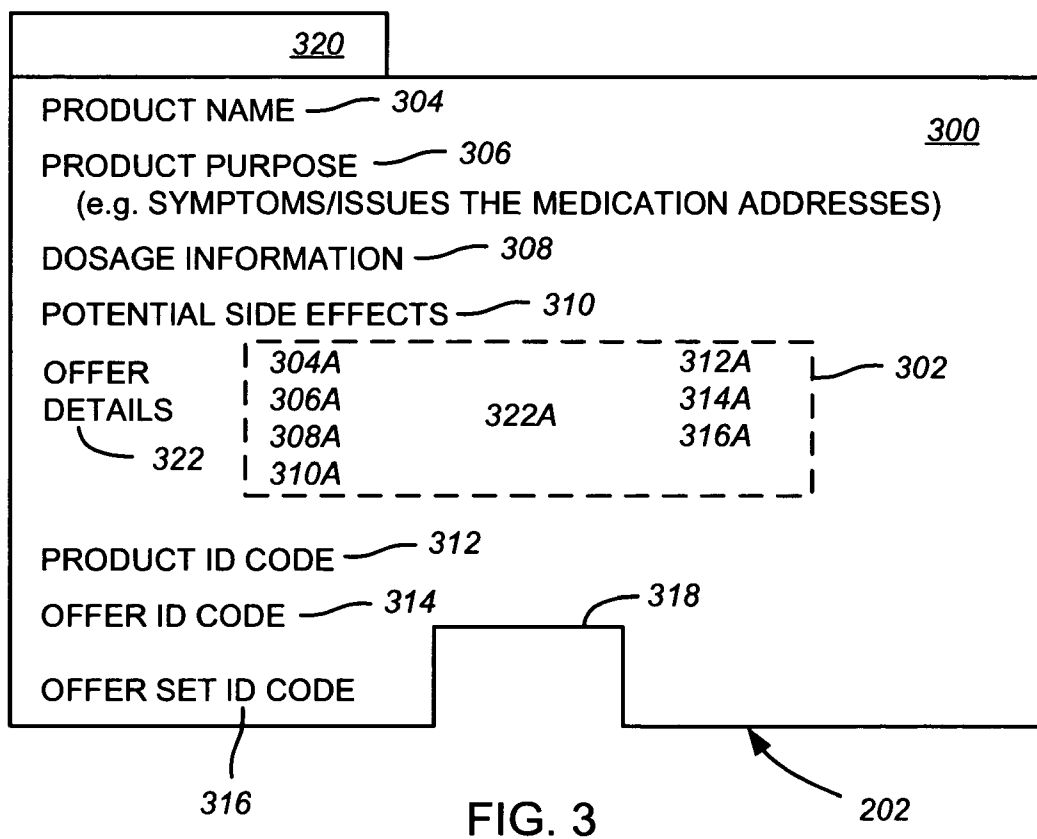
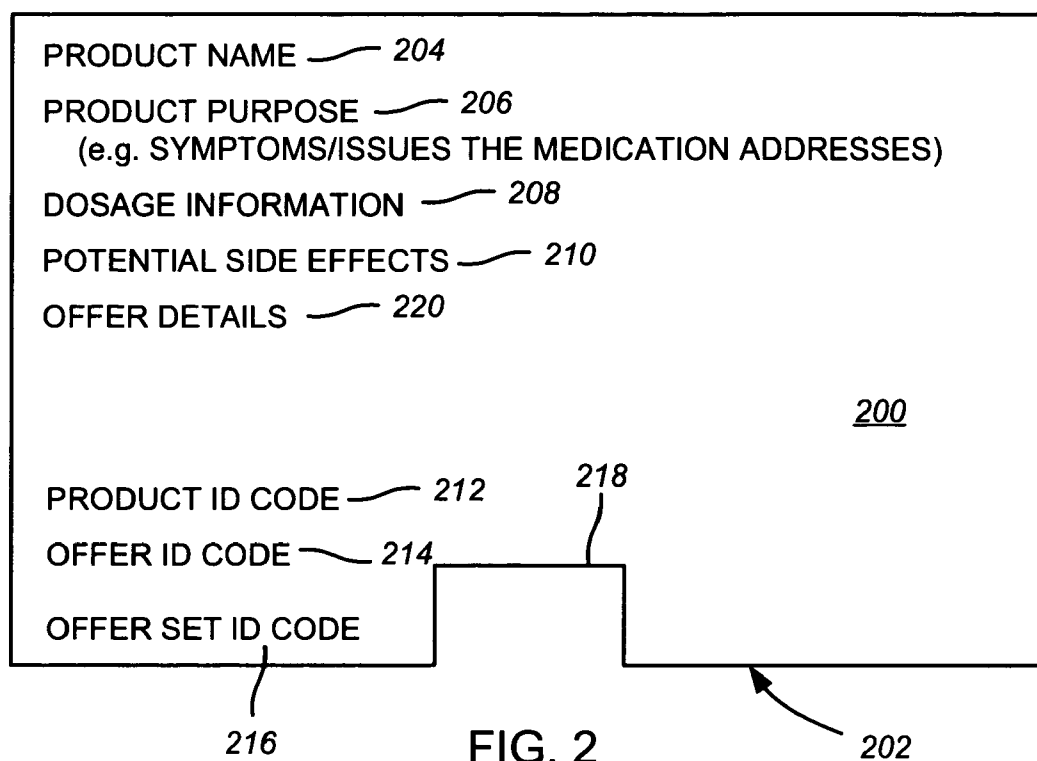


FIG. 1



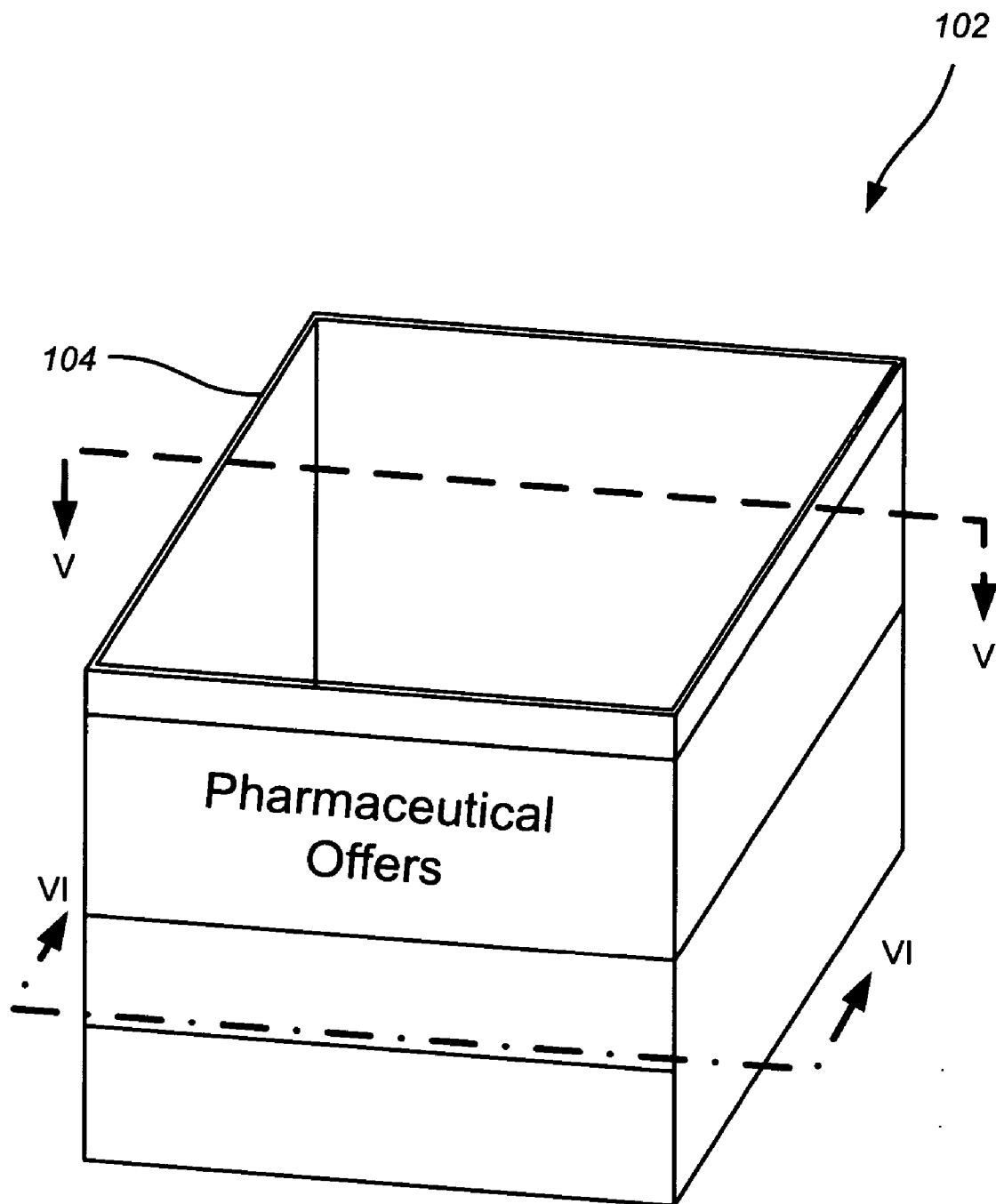


FIG. 4

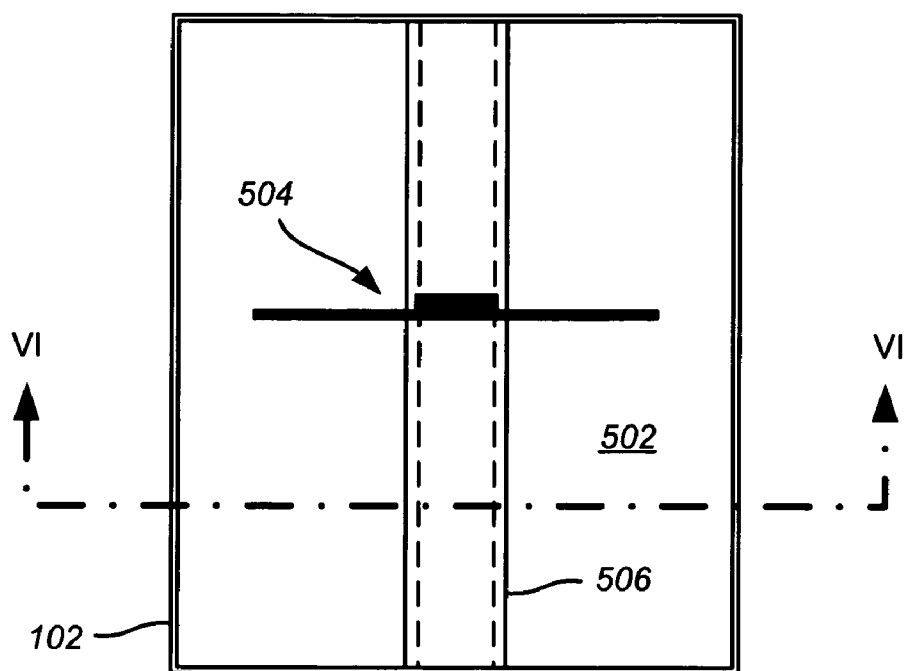


FIG. 5

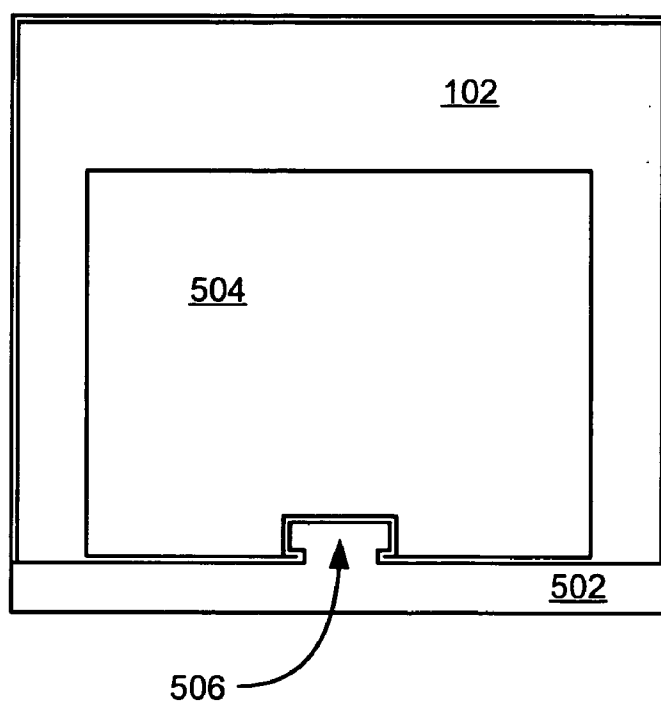
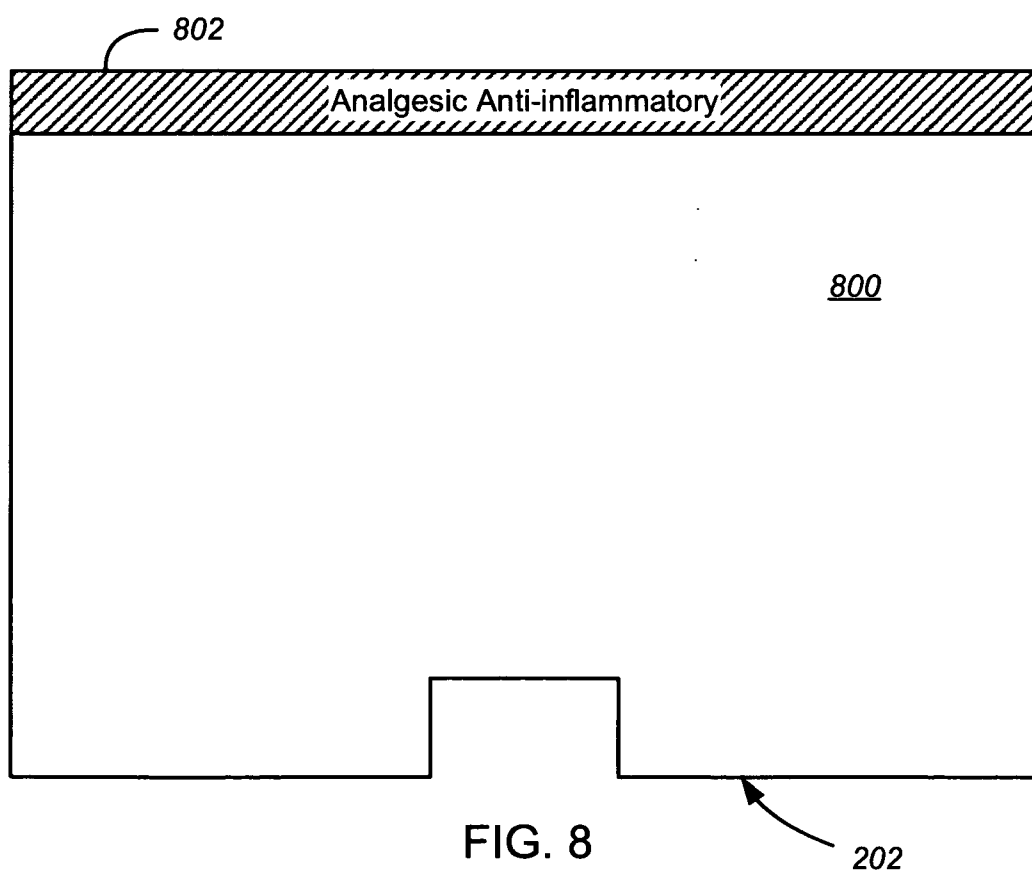
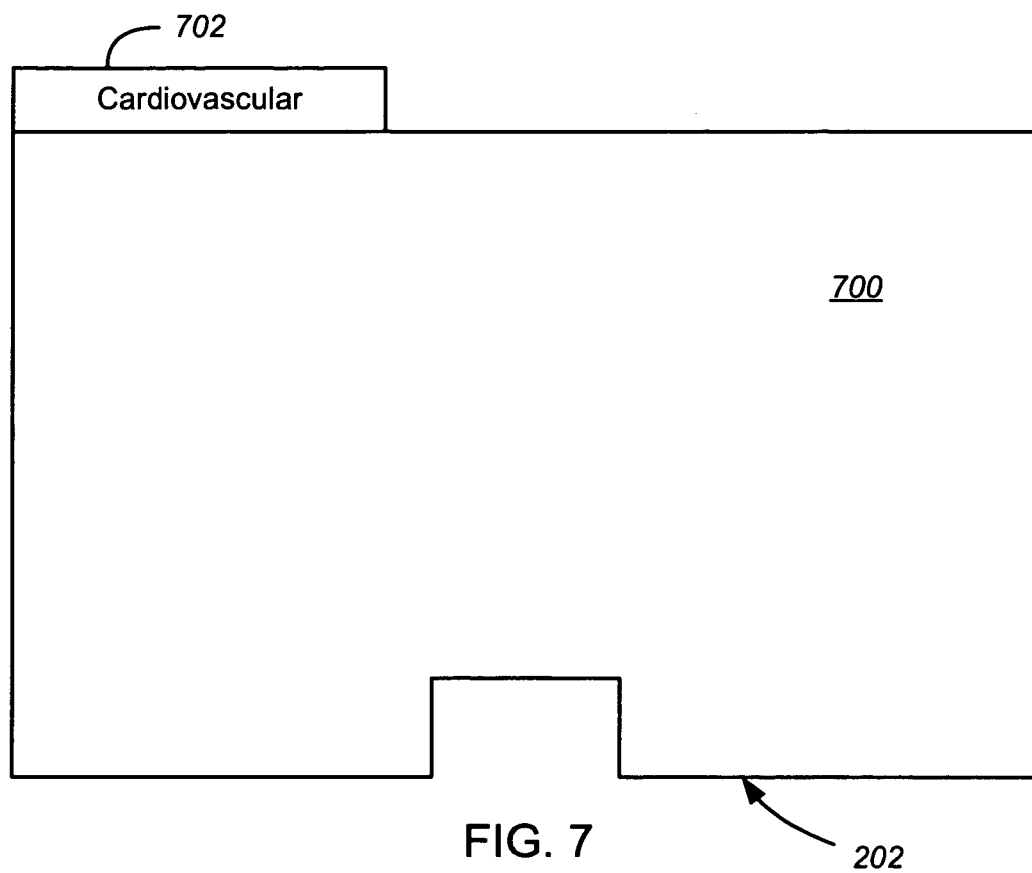


FIG. 6



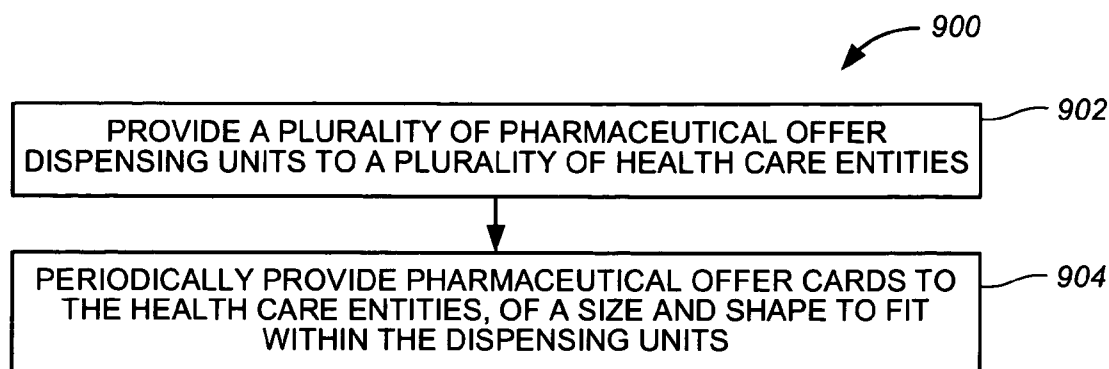


FIG. 9

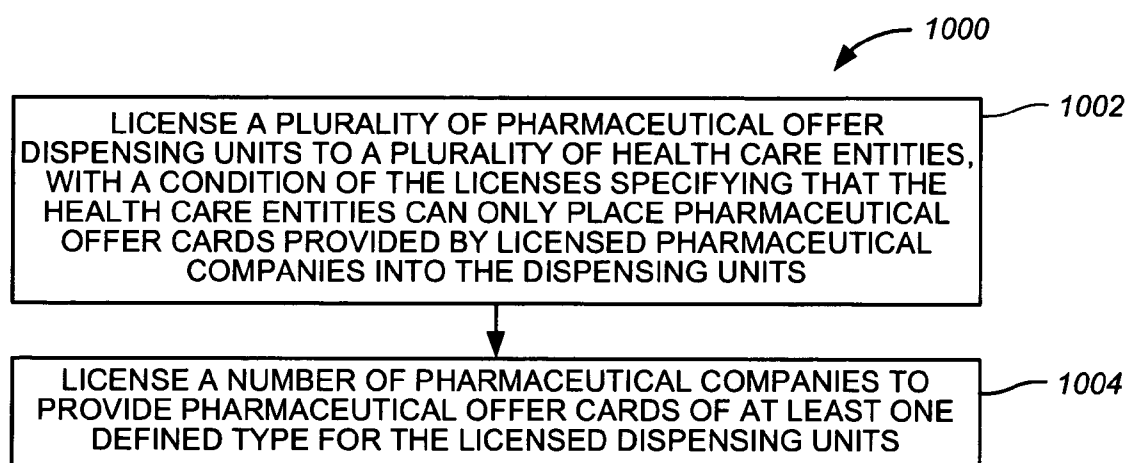


FIG. 10

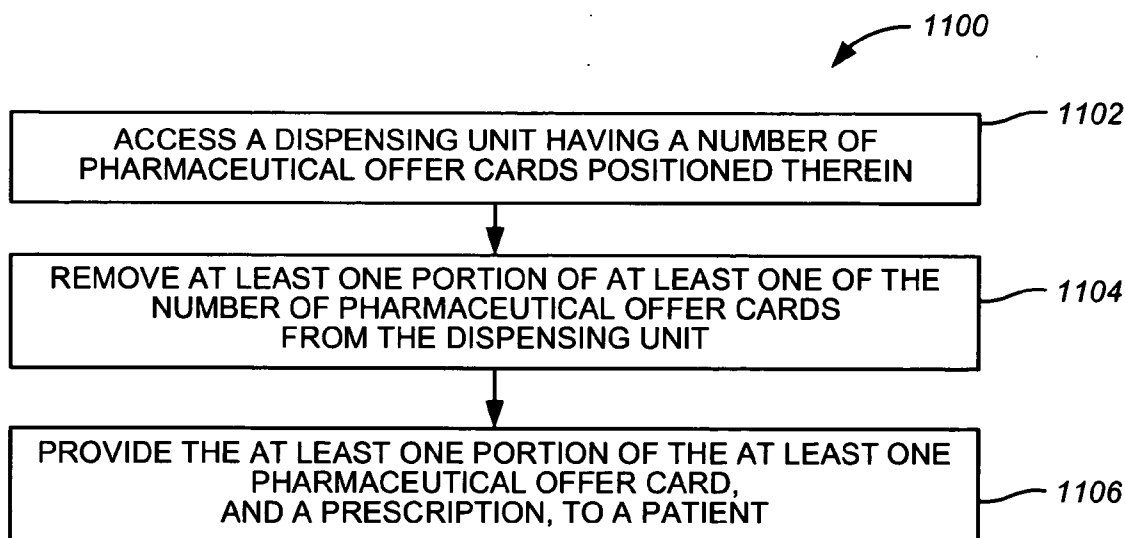


FIG. 11

# PHARMACEUTICAL OFFER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS, AND METHODS FOR DISTRIBUTING AND USING SAME

## BACKGROUND

[0001] Pharmaceutical samples (e.g., sample medications) are often given to physicians for distribution to their patients at no cost to the patients. Typically, pharmaceutical companies will provide the samples to pharmaceutical representatives, who in turn provide the samples to physicians. Physicians typically store the samples in drawers, cabinets, or closets, which often become chaotic and unorganized. Locating a desired sample may therefore be difficult.

[0002] Another problem with samples is that a physician is lured into operating an unregulated pharmacy. That is, various office personnel may have access to the physician's sample closet, and sometimes the samples may be taken home or used by office personnel without physician approval.

[0003] The problem of operating an unregulated pharmacy may be alleviated by providing physicians with coupons or vouchers that may be redeemed by patients for free or discounted pharmaceuticals. However, coupons and vouchers can sometimes be even more difficult to organize than samples, as they are typically smaller and easier to shuffle together and overlook.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] In one embodiment, a pharmaceutical offer distribution system comprises a plurality of pharmaceutical offer cards and a dispensing unit. Each of the plurality of pharmaceutical offer cards has an edge that implements a standardized relief pattern. The dispensing unit holds the plurality of pharmaceutical offer cards. The dispensing unit has a surface that is configured to mate with the standardized relief pattern of the pharmaceutical offer cards, to thereby retain the pharmaceutical offer cards until they are distributed to patients.

[0005] In another embodiment, a pharmaceutical offer distribution system comprises a plurality of pharmaceutical type indicator cards and a dispensing unit. The pharmaceutical type indicator cards are provided for identifying groups of pharmaceutical offer cards. The dispensing unit holds the plurality of pharmaceutical type indicator cards.

[0006] In another embodiment, a method for distributing pharmaceutical offers comprises 1) providing a plurality of pharmaceutical offer dispensing units to a plurality of health care entities, and 2) periodically providing pharmaceutical offer cards to the health care entities. The pharmaceutical offer cards are of a size and shape to fit within the dispensing units.

[0007] In another embodiment, a method for distributing pharmaceutical offers comprises licensing a plurality of pharmaceutical offer dispensing units to a plurality of health care entities, with a condition of the licenses specifying that the health care entities can only place pharmaceutical offer cards provided by licensed pharmaceutical companies into the dispensing units. A number of pharmaceutical companies are then licensed to provide pharmaceutical offer cards of at least one defined type for the licensed dispensing units.

[0008] In yet another embodiment a method for dispensing pharmaceutical offers to patients comprises: 1) accessing a dispensing unit having a number of pharmaceutical offer cards positioned therein; 2) removing at least one portion of at least one of the number of pharmaceutical offer cards from the dispensing unit; and 3) providing the at least one portion of the at least one pharmaceutical offer card, and a prescription, to a patient.

[0009] Other embodiments are also disclosed.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0010] Illustrative embodiments of the invention are illustrated in the drawings, in which:

[0011] **FIG. 1** illustrates a perspective view of an exemplary pharmaceutical offer distribution system;

[0012] **FIG. 2** illustrates a first exemplary embodiment of a pharmaceutical offer card for the system shown in **FIG. 1**;

[0013] **FIG. 3** illustrates a second exemplary embodiment of a pharmaceutical offer card for the system shown in **FIG. 1**;

[0014] **FIG. 4** illustrates a perspective view of the dispensing unit of the **FIG. 1** system;

[0015] **FIG. 5** illustrates a top plan view of the **FIG. 4** dispensing unit;

[0016] **FIG. 6** illustrates a cross-sectional view of the **FIG. 4** dispensing unit;

[0017] **FIG. 7** illustrates a first exemplary embodiment of a pharmaceutical type indicator card for the system shown in **FIG. 1**;

[0018] **FIG. 8** illustrates a second exemplary embodiment of a pharmaceutical type indicator card for the system shown in **FIG. 1**;

[0019] **FIG. 9** illustrates a first exemplary method for distributing pharmaceutical offers;

[0020] **FIG. 10** illustrates a second exemplary method for distributing pharmaceutical offers; and

[0021] **FIG. 11** illustrates a third exemplary method for distributing pharmaceutical offers.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0022] A system **100** for distributing pharmaceutical offer cards **200, 300** is shown in **FIG. 1**. The system **100** comprises a plurality of pharmaceutical offer cards **200, 300**, and a dispensing unit **102**. Exemplary embodiments of the pharmaceutical offer cards **200, 300** are shown in **FIGS. 2 & 3**, and additional details of the dispensing unit **102** are shown in **FIGS. 4, 5, & 6**.

[0023] As will be discussed in more detail later in this description, each pharmaceutical offer card **200, 300** provides one or more pharmaceutical offers (e.g., coupons or vouchers) that a physician may distribute to his or her patients.

[0024] By way of example, the pharmaceutical offer cards **200, 300** may be paper, cardboard or plastic cards. Preferably, the pharmaceutical offer cards **200, 300** are of a standardized size and shape so that they may all align



properly and/or fit securely within the dispensing unit 102. However, variations, to some degree, are permissible. As shown in FIGS. 2 & 3, the pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300 may be approximately rectangular in shape, although they could alternately take on a variety of shapes and sizes.

[0025] The pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300 may each comprise an edge that implements a standardized relief pattern 202. The standardized relief pattern 202 ensures that the pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300 align properly and/or fit securely within the dispensing unit 102. As shown in FIGS. 2 & 3, the standardized relief pattern 202 may comprise a rectangular notch 218, 318 in the bottom edges of the cards 200, 300. Alternately, pharmaceutical offer cards may implement a standardized relief pattern of alternative shape and size; and the standardized relief pattern may be positioned on an alternate edge of the pharmaceutical offer cards, so long as the standardized relief pattern corresponds with a surface of the dispensing unit 102.

[0026] The dispensing unit 102 retains and organizes the pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300, as shown in FIG. 1. As shown in FIG. 4, the dispensing unit 102 may generally take the form of a box or tray having an opening 104 for inserting, reviewing and/or removing the pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300. While FIGS. 1 & 4 illustrate the dispensing unit 102 with an open top, a dispensing unit could alternatively comprise a smaller or larger opening, or the presence or absence of sides. The dispensing unit 102 could also comprise a lid (not shown). In one embodiment, a dispensing unit could take the form of a simple tray or support structure that sits horizontally, vertically, or at an angle. The dispensing unit could also take the form of a book or binder.

[0027] As shown in FIGS. 5 & 6, the dispensing unit 102 may further comprise a surface, such as bottom surface 502, that is configured to mate with the standardized relief pattern 202 of the pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300. The surface 502 of the dispensing unit 102 may comprise a raised structure 506 which extends the length of the dispensing unit 102. The raised structure 506 provides an alignment mechanism (and possibly a retaining mechanism) for the pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300 so that they are easily accessible. Additionally, an adjustable mechanism 504 may be coupled to the raised structure 506. The adjustable mechanism 504 may be slideably adjusted or moved within the dispensing unit 102 so as to better hold the cards 200, 300 when the dispensing unit 102 is not full.

[0028] Referring now to the pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300, it is noted that the dispensing unit 102 may hold a plurality of pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300 supplied by a plurality of different pharmaceutical companies. Generally, the pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300 may be distributed to patients by health care entities (e.g., physicians) so that they may be redeemed for free or reduced-cost pharmaceuticals at a pharmacy. Typically, the pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300 will be distributed to the health care entities through pharmaceutical representatives that periodically visit the health care entities to supply new pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300. By way of example, the cards 200, 300 may correspond to medications that a pharmaceutical company is trying to promote. Under current laws, the pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300 need to be accompanied by a prescription before they can be redeemed (i.e., if the

cards 200, 300 are for prescription medications). In some cases, some of the cards 200, 300 may correspond to non-prescription medications.

[0029] As shown in FIGS. 2 & 3, each pharmaceutical offer card 200, 300 may comprise the name of an offered product 204, 304, as well as details of a pharmaceutical company's offer 220, 322 (e.g., what quantity of product is being offered; whether a product is being offered free or at a discount; etc.). In addition, the cards 200, 300 may comprise other useful information, such as prescribing guidelines 206, 208, 210, 306, 308, 310. By way of example, the prescribing guidelines may comprise the product's purpose 206, 306 (e.g., symptoms or issues the medication addresses), dosage information 208, 308, and potential side-effects 210, 310. The cards 200, 300 may also comprise additional information, such as an expiration date and contact information for a pharmaceutical company and/or its representative.

[0030] The pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300 may also comprise offer identification codes 214, 314 that may be used to identify and track the cards 200, 300. The offer identification codes 214, 314 may take a variety of forms and may, for example, comprise bar codes or numbers. By providing a means to identify and track the pharmaceutical offer cards 200, 300, offer redemption and patient demographic information may be provided to pharmaceutical and/or marketing companies (as described in further detail later in this description). In some cases, each card 200, 300 may be provided a unique offer identification code 214, 314. In other cases, similar offer cards may be provided with the same offer code.

[0031] Each pharmaceutical offer card 200, 300 may also comprise a product identification code 212, 312, and/or a unique "offer set" identification code 216, 316. As used herein, an "offer set" is a set of offer cards that is provided to a physician, perhaps with its own indexing card. Other codes, for tracking a plurality of variables, may also be provided on the cards 200, 300.

[0032] In some cases, a pharmaceutical offer card 200 may contain only a single offer 220, and the card 200 itself may be provided to a patient. See FIG. 2. In other cases, and as shown in FIG. 3, a pharmaceutical offer card 300 may comprise a detachable offer 302 that may be punched, peeled, or torn from the card 300 for distribution to a patient. Alternatively, a pharmaceutical offer card 300 may comprise a plurality of detachable offers 302 that may be punched, peeled, or torn from the card 300, for distribution to a plurality of patients. In the latter case, the product name 304A, offer details 322A, identification codes 312A, 314A, 316A, as well as any of the other prescribing guidelines 306A, 308A, 310A may be alternately or additionally provided on each of the individual offers 302.

[0033] Some of the pharmaceutical offer cards 300 may be tabbed, as shown in FIG. 3. The tab 320 may comprise an indication of the type or set of a group of pharmaceutical offer cards 300, as well as the name of the product offered by the card 300, its expiration date, and/or other information. The tabbed pharmaceutical offer cards 300 may assist in the general organization of the dispensing unit 102.

[0034] As shown in FIGS. 1, 7 & 8, the system 100 may further comprise a number of pharmaceutical type indicator

cards **700**, **800** for identifying categories or groups of the pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300**. By way of example, the indicator cards **700**, **800** may be paper, cardboard or plastic cards that have one or more dimensions that exceed those of the pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300** that they identify. In some cases, this enlarged dimension may take the form of a tab **702**, while in other cases it may take the form of a card edge **802**. Regardless, the point of the enlarged dimension is to make the indicator cards **700**, **800** visible over the offer cards **200**, **300**. Preferably, the tab **702** or edge **802** provides the pharmaceutical “type indicator” (e.g., Cardiovascular, or Analgesic Anti-Inflammatory). In one embodiment, the tab **702** or edge **802** comprises a color-coded indicator (e.g., a colored background for text that identifies a pharmaceutical type).

[0035] In addition to organizing the pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300**, the pharmaceutical type indicator cards **700**, **800** may provide (or repeat) other information, such as prescribing guidelines and/or other information related to the groups or sets of cards **200**, **300** they identify. The indicator cards **700**, **800** may also comprise additional information, such as an expiration date and contact information for a pharmaceutical company and/or its representative.

[0036] In one exemplary embodiment, the indicator cards that are provided for a system **100** may identify any or all of the following categories of pharmaceuticals: Analgesic Anti-inflammatory, Antimicrobials, Pulmonary Allergy ENT, Cardiovascular, Dermatological, Endocrine Metabolic, Gastrointestinal, Genitourinary, Vitamin Mineral Nutrition, Neurology, OB GYN, Ophthalmic, Psychiatric, and Hematology Oncology.

[0037] Preferably, one or more edges of the pharmaceutical type indicator cards **700**, **800** implement the same standardized relief pattern **202** as the pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300** (e.g., an edge having a notch).

[0038] Having described the system **100**, as well as various modifications to the system **100**, methods of using the system **100** will now be described. In this regard, **FIG. 9** illustrates a first exemplary method **900** for distributing pharmaceutical offers (using, for example, the system **100** shown in **FIG. 1**). The method **900** comprises providing **902** a plurality of pharmaceutical offer dispensing units **102** to a plurality of health care entities, and then periodically providing pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300** to the health care entities. As discussed above, the pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300** should be of a size and shape to fit within the dispensing units **102**. In some cases, some of the offer cards **200**, **300** may be provided to the health care entities at the same time that the dispensing units **102** are provided.

[0039] **FIG. 10** illustrates a second exemplary method **1000** for distributing pharmaceutical offers. In this embodiment, a plurality of pharmaceutical offer dispensing units **102** are licensed **1002** to a plurality of health care entities, with a condition of the licenses specifying that the health care entities can only place pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300** provided by licensed pharmaceutical companies into the dispensing units **102**. A number of pharmaceutical companies are then licensed **1004** to provide pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300** of at least one defined type for the licensed dispensing units **102**. The “defined type” may variously specify the size(s), shape(s), format(s), color-coding and/or required information for the cards **200**, **300**.

[0040] **FIG. 11** illustrates a third exemplary method **1100** for distributing pharmaceutical offers. The method **1100** comprises accessing **1102** a dispensing unit **102** having a number of pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300** positioned therein, and then removing **1104** at least one portion of at least one of the number of pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300** (e.g., the entire card **200**, or a portion **302** thereof. The card **200** or portion **302** thereof (i.e., a pharmaceutical offer) is then provided **1106** to a patient along with a prescription.

[0041] In one embodiment of the method **1100**, accessing the dispensing unit **102** may comprise locating a pharmaceutical offer card **200**, **300** by reviewing a plurality of pharmaceutical type indicator cards **700**, **800** that identify groups of the offer cards **200**, **300**. The prescription may be written by referring to prescribing guidelines printed on A) one of the pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300**, or B) one of the pharmaceutical type indicator cards **700**, **800**.

[0042] Use of the dispensing units **102** can be advantageous in that 1) they provide a means of organizing and retaining pharmaceutical offers (e.g., coupons and vouchers), 2) they are more easily stationed where a physician can access them (e.g., in a central location, or in each exam room), and 3) they increase the likelihood that pharmaceutical offers will actually be distributed. Printing prescribing guidelines on the offers also helps to increase the likelihood that pharmaceutical offers will be distributed, since a physician does not need to retreat to his or her office to look up prescribing guidelines for a pharmaceutical for which an offer is available.

[0043] An increased likelihood of pharmaceutical offers being distributed not only helps patients, but it helps pharmaceutical companies realize a return on their significant expenditure on pharmaceutical representatives.

[0044] Having described various systems **100** and methods **900**, **1000**, **1100** for distributing pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300**, an exemplary method of tracking the pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300** will now be described. First, a number of pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300** are provided to health care entities along with the dispensing unit **102**. The health care entities may then be provided with a plurality of different pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300** from a plurality of different pharmaceutical companies and representatives. Because the size and shape of the pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300** and dispensing unit **102** are standardized, the pharmaceutical offer cards **200**, **300** will fit properly within the dispensing unit **102**.

[0045] Preferably, the offer cards **200**, **300** each comprise an identification code of some sort. Then, upon redemption of an offer by a patient, and after a pharmacist records various prescribing information associated with the offer redemption, a pharmaceutical company may determine, for example, 1) which pharmaceutical representative distributed the offer, 2) which physician distributed the offer, and 3) which pharmaceutical offers are being redeemed most often. Preferably, an offer’s redemption data is transmitted to a pharmaceutical company or third-party data collection service electronically.

What is claimed is:

1. A pharmaceutical offer distribution system, comprising:
  - a plurality of pharmaceutical offer cards, each card having an edge that implements a standardized relief pattern; and
  - a dispensing unit to hold the plurality of pharmaceutical offer cards, the dispensing unit having a surface that is configured to mate with the standardized relief pattern of the pharmaceutical offer cards to thereby retain the pharmaceutical offer cards until they are distributed to patients.
2. The system of claim 1, wherein the standardized relief pattern comprises a notch.
3. The system of claim 1, further comprising a number of pharmaceutical type indicator cards for identifying groups of the pharmaceutical offer cards, each indicator card having an edge that implements the standardized relief pattern.
4. The system of claim 3, wherein each of the indicator cards is sized larger than the pharmaceutical offer cards in at least one dimension, and wherein a part of each indicator card that exceeds the dimensions of the pharmaceutical offer cards comprises an indication of a pharmaceutical type.
5. The system of claim 3, wherein each of the indicator cards comprises a tab comprising an indication of a pharmaceutical type.
6. The system of claim 3, wherein at least some of the indicator cards comprise pharmaceutical prescribing guidelines thereon.
7. The system of claim 3, wherein the indicator cards comprise color-coded indicators of pharmaceutical types.
8. The system of claim 1, wherein at least some of the pharmaceutical offers cards comprise pharmaceutical prescribing guidelines thereon.
9. The system of claim 1, wherein at least some of the pharmaceutical offers cards comprise offer identification codes thereon.
10. The system of claim 1, wherein at least some of the pharmaceutical offer cards comprise a product name, offer identification code, and prescribing guidelines thereon.
11. The system of claim 1, wherein all of the pharmaceutical offer cards comprise a product name, offer identification code, and prescribing guidelines thereon.
12. The system of claim 1, wherein at least some of the pharmaceutical offer cards comprise a plurality of detachable pharmaceutical offers thereon.
13. A pharmaceutical offer distribution system, comprising:
  - a plurality of pharmaceutical type indicator cards for identifying groups of pharmaceutical offer cards; and
  - a dispensing unit to hold the plurality of pharmaceutical type indicator cards.
14. The system of claim 13, wherein each indicator card has an edge that implements a standardized relief pattern; and wherein the dispensing unit has a surface that is configured to mate with the standardized relief pattern of the indicator cards, to thereby retain the indicator cards.
15. The system of claim 13, wherein the indicator cards comprise color-coded indicators of pharmaceutical types.
16. A method for distributing pharmaceutical offers, comprising:
  - providing a plurality of pharmaceutical offer dispensing units to a plurality of health care entities; and

periodically providing pharmaceutical offer cards to the health care entities, of a size and shape to fit within the dispensing units.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising, providing at least some of the pharmaceutical offer cards at the same time that the dispensing units are provided.

18. The method of claim 16, wherein each pharmaceutical offer card has an edge that implements a standardized relief pattern; and wherein each dispensing unit has a surface that is configured to mate with the standardized relief pattern of the pharmaceutical offer cards, to thereby retain the pharmaceutical offer cards until they are distributed to patients.

19. The method of claim 16, wherein additional ones of the pharmaceutical offer cards are provided to the health care entities on a periodic basis.

20. The method of claim 16, further comprising, providing an offer identification code on at least some of the pharmaceutical offer cards.

21. A method for distributing pharmaceutical offers, comprising:

licensing a plurality of pharmaceutical offer dispensing units to a plurality of health care entities, with a condition of the licenses specifying that the health care entities can only place pharmaceutical offer cards provided by licensed pharmaceutical companies into the dispensing units; and

licensing a number of pharmaceutical companies to provide pharmaceutical offer cards of at least one defined type for the licensed dispensing units.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein the at least one defined type specifies a size and shape of the pharmaceutical offer cards.

23. The method of claim 21, wherein the at least one defined type specifies required information that must appear on the pharmaceutical offer cards.

24. The method of claim 21, wherein the at least one defined type specifies a color-coding of the pharmaceutical offer cards.

25. The method of claim 21, wherein the licensed dispensing units are provided with pharmaceutical type indicator cards.

26. A method for dispensing pharmaceutical offers to patients, comprising:

accessing a dispensing unit having a number of pharmaceutical offer cards positioned therein;

removing at least one portion of at least one of the number of pharmaceutical offer cards from the dispensing unit; and

providing the at least one portion of the at least one pharmaceutical offer card, and a prescription, to a patient.

27. The method of claim 26, wherein accessing the dispensing unit comprises locating a pharmaceutical offer card by reviewing a plurality of pharmaceutical type indicator cards that identify groups of the pharmaceutical offer cards.

28. The method of claim 26, wherein removing the at least one portion of the at least one pharmaceutical offer card comprises removing an entire pharmaceutical offer card.

**29.** The method of claim 26, wherein removing the at least one portion of the at least one pharmaceutical offer card comprises peeling off a portion of one of the pharmaceutical offer cards.

**30.** The method of claim 26, further comprising, writing the prescription by referring to prescribing guidelines printed on one of the pharmaceutical offer cards.

**31.** The method of claim 26, further comprising, writing the prescription by referring to prescribing guidelines

printed on a pharmaceutical type indicator card corresponding to the pharmaceutical offer card from which the at least one portion is removed.

**32.** The method of claim 26, further comprising, periodically inserting new pharmaceutical offer cards into the dispensing unit.

\* \* \* \* \*