CLAIMS

1. A method for use in handling a plurality of receptacles containing ones of a plurality of unit-dose medicaments, comprising:

obtaining at least one image of each one of said plurality of receptacles;

processing said at least one image of each one of said plurality of receptacles to extract corresponding image data;

comparing said corresponding image data for each one of said plurality of receptacles to corresponding stored data;

generating said stored data corresponding with at least one predetermined attribute of each one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments for use in said comparing step; and

discarding the each one of said plurality of receptacles if the comparing indicates that said corresponding image data exceeds a predetermined acceptance range of the corresponding stored data, wherein the step of obtaining at least one image further includes:

first obtaining at least a first image using a first imaging device; and

second obtaining at least a second image using a second imaging device, wherein the first obtaining step and the second obtaining step are completed at different locations, wherein the comparing step further includes:

first comparing said corresponding image data to stored data corresponding with at least one predetermined attribute of said corresponding one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments; and

second comparing said corresponding image data to stored data corresponding with at least one predetermined attribute of said corresponding one of said plurality of receptacles, and wherein for each one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments the generating step includes:

obtaining at least a test image of each of a plurality of test samples corresponding to said one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments;

extracting test image data from each said test image for each of said plurality of test samples;

inspecting said plurality of test samples in one of: an automated manner using at least one software algorithm, manual manner, and a partially automated and partially manual manner, to identify acceptable ones of said test samples; and

only if a said test sample is acceptable, then using said test image data corresponding with said acceptable ones of said plurality of test samples to generate said

stored data corresponding with said one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments, and if a said test sample is not acceptable, then disregarding said test image data corresponding with the unacceptable test sample, wherein for each one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments said using said test image data step comprises: performing statistical analyses of said test image data corresponding with said acceptable ones of said plurality of test samples to establish a corresponding acceptance range for use in said comparing step.

2. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising: sealably closing said plurality of receptacles, wherein for each one of said plurality of receptacles said sealably closing step is completed prior to said step of obtaining at least one image.

3. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein for each one of said plurality of receptacles said step of obtaining at least one image comprises:

illuminating one side of said one of said plurality of receptacles; and

capturing said at least one image on another side of said one of said plurality of receptacles during at least a portion of said illuminating step.

4. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein for each one of said plurality of receptacles said corresponding image data comprises at least one of a contents-related group consisting of:

data relating to a presence of an object within said one of said plurality of receptacles;

data relating to a number of objects within said one of said plurality of receptacles;

data relating to a shape of an object within said one of said plurality of receptacles; and

data relating to a size of an object within said one of said plurality of receptacles.

5. The method as recited in claim 4, wherein said at least one predetermined attribute of said corresponding one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments is one of a first predetermined group consisting of:

a predetermined number of physically discrete units comprising said corresponding one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments;

a predetermined shape of each physically discrete unit comprising said corresponding one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments; and

a predetermined size of each physically discrete unit comprising said corresponding one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments.

6. The method as recited in claim 5, wherein for each one of said plurality of receptacles said corresponding image data comprises at least one of a receptacle-related group consisting of:

data relating to a shape of a predetermined sealed region of said one of said plurality of receptacles;

data relating to a shape of a predetermined edge portion of said one of said plurality of receptacles; and

data relating to a light transmissivity of a predetermined region of said one of said plurality of receptacles.

7. The method as recited in claim 6, wherein said at least one predetermined attribute of said corresponding one of said plurality of receptacles is one of a second predetermined group consisting of:

a predetermined shape of said predetermined sealed region of said one of said plurality of receptacles;

a predetermined shape of said predetermined edge portion of said one of said plurality of receptacles; and

a predetermined light transmissivity of said predetermined region of said one of said plurality of receptacles.

8. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising:

separately locating each of said plurality of receptacles at a predetermined fill location for intended receipt of said corresponding one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments, said locating step being completed before said step of obtaining at least one image.

9. The method as recited in claim 8, wherein for each one of said plurality of receptacles said locating step comprises:

initiating a fill operation to insert said corresponding one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments into corresponding one of said plurality of receptacles.

10. The method as recited in claim 9, further comprising:

separately closing each of said plurality of receptacles, wherein for each one of said plurality of receptacles the closing step is completed after said locating step and prior to said step of obtaining at least one image.

11. The method as recited in claim 10, wherein said closing step is completed at a predetermined closure location.

12. The method as recited in claim 11, wherein said step of obtaining at least one image is completed at said predetermined closure location.

13. The method as recited in claim 12, further comprising:

providing a machine-readable marking on each of said plurality of receptacles, wherein for each one of said plurality of receptacles a corresponding machine-readable marking comprises data relating to said corresponding one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments;

verifying the presence and accuracy of the corresponding machine-readable marking for each of said plurality of receptacles, wherein any of said plurality of receptacles that is not verified is identified as non-verified; and

removing any non-verified receptacles.

14. The method as recited in claim 13, wherein each of said steps of obtaining at least one image, processing, comparing, discarding, locating, initiating, closing, providing, verifying and removing steps is at least partially automated.

15. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising:

collecting said corresponding image data and comparison data resulting from said comparing step to generate historical data; and

utilizing said historical data to modify said stored data.

16. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising:

storing said stored data in a database at a facility where a medicament dispensary is located; and

providing data from a remote database to modify said stored data, wherein said remote database comprises data collected from a plurality of medicament dispensaries employing said method.

17. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein for each one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments said stored data comprises pattern data indicative of at least one acceptable shape for said one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments.

18. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein for each one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments said stored data comprises pattern data indicative of a plurality of acceptable shapes for said one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments.

19. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein for each one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments said stored data comprises physical attribute data indicative of at least one acceptable physical measure for said one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments.

20. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein for each one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments said stored data comprises physical attribute data indicative of a plurality of acceptable physical measures for said one of said plurality of unit-dose medicaments.

21. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein said step of generating said stored data is carried out prior to said step of comparing.