CLAIMS

1. A pharmaceutical dispensing unit comprising a conveyor means having:

   a receiving end for receiving an article to be labelled;

   a discharge end for discharging the article once labelled;

   a label applicator for attaching a label to the article; and

   a resiliently deformable object for securely forcing the label onto the article,

   the discharge end terminating at a dispensing container for discharging the article after the article has been labelled into the dispensing container wherein the dispensing container is accessible from a front of the pharmaceutical dispenser unit so that a patient can remove the article from the dispensing container.

2. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in claim 1, in which the article has a curved, uneven, angled or flat surface.

3. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, in which the article is a bottle, box or sachet.

4. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, in which the article is a container that contains a medicament.

5. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, in which the conveyor means is a continuous conveyor belt extending around rollers at opposite ends of the conveyor means.

6. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, in which the label applicator includes an applicator arm movable between a retracted position in which it receives the label at the free end of the arm and an extended position in which an adhesive side of the label is pushed onto the article.

7. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, in which the resiliently deformable object is movable between a position removed from the article and a position in which it is forced onto the label and the article so that it deforms to take the shape of an exposed side of the article to force the label to securely attach to the article.

8. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in claim 7, in which the resiliently deformable object is made from foam rubber or is a sponge.

9. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in claim 3, in which a suction means is movable between an engagement position in which it engages the sachet in a container and a retracted position in which the sachet is attached to the suction means and moved out of the container.

10. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in claim 9, in which a discard apparatus pushes the container off the conveyor when the suction means is in its retracted position.

11. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in claims 9 or 10, in which the suction means releases the sachet when the suction means is in its retracted position and when the container is removed from the conveyor so that the sachet falls onto the conveyor.

12. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, in which the conveyor receives the article at the receiving end, the receiving end terminating underneath a discharge end of a delivery chute.

13. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in claim 12, in which the dispensing container includes a trapdoor.

14. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in claim 13, in which the pharmaceutical dispensing unit also includes a patient interface in the front cover thereof.

15. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in claim 14, in which the patient interface includes a screen and communication means having a microphone and a speaker, a keypad and a card reader.

16. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, in which the conveyor moves the article along underneath the label applicator for attaching a label and then to underneath the resiliently deformable object for securely forcing the label onto the article.

17. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, in which alignment means align the article to be labelled on the conveyor means before a label is applied to the article.

18. The pharmaceutical dispensing unit as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, in which a suction device is located above the conveyor means and which suction device includes a suction cup movable onto the article to attached to the article through negative vacuum pressure and to lift the article away from the conveyor means by moving the suction cup away from the conveyor means.

19. A labelling method comprising the steps of:
    - moving an article, being a container containing medicine, on a conveyor,
    - to pass by a label applicator; attaching at least part of a label, to the article with the label applicator;
    - forcing, a resiliently deformable object against part of the at least partially attached label in the direction of the article; and
    - allowing the article to move further on the conveyor until it falls, under force of gravity, off the end of a discharge end of the conveyor into a dispensing container which is accessible from a front of a pharmaceutical dispenser so that a patient can remove the article from the dispensing container.

20. The method as claimed in claim 19, in which the method includes the step of aligning the article on the conveyor means.

21. The method as claimed in claims 19 or 20, in which the method includes applying a suction force to the article to lift the article out of a dispensing box and to release the suction force from the article to drop the article back onto the conveyor means once the dispensing box has been moved off the conveyor means.

22. The method as claimed in any one of claims 19 to 21, including the step of forcing an incorrect article, and article having been incorrectly labelled or the dispensing container or box off the side of the conveyor means.

23. A labelling apparatus comprising a conveyor belt having:
a receiving end for receiving an open top dispensing box with an article to be labelled therein;
a discharge end for discharging the article;
a label applicator for attaching a label to the article;
a resiliently deformable object moveable to securely force the label onto the article;
a suction cup movable between an engagement position in which it engages the article in a dispensing box and a retracted position in which the article is attached to the suction cup and moved out of the dispensing box; and
a discard apparatus that pushes the dispensing box off the conveyor belt after which the suction cup releases the article so that the article falls back onto the conveyor.

24. The apparatus of claim 23, wherein the article has a curved, uneven, angled or flat surface.

25. The apparatus as claimed in claims 23 or 24, wherein the article is a bottle, box or sachet.

26. The apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 25, wherein the article is a container that contains a medicament.

27. The apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 26, wherein the conveyor belt is a continuous conveyor belt extending around rollers at opposite ends of the conveyor belt.

28. The apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 27, wherein the label applicator includes an applicator arm movable between a retracted position in which it receives the label at the free end of the arm and an extended position in which an adhesive side of the label is pushed onto the article.

29. The apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 28, wherein the resiliently deformable object is movable between a position removed from the article to a position in which it is forced onto the label and the article so that it deforms to take the shape of an exposed side of the article to force the label to securely attach to the article.

30. The apparatus of claim 29, wherein the resiliently deformable object is made from foam rubber or is a sponge.

31. The apparatus of claim 25, further comprising the suction cup movable between an engagement position in which it engages the sachet in a dispensing box and a retracted position in which the sachet is attached to the suction cup and moved out of the dispensing box.

32. The apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 31, wherein the conveyor belt receives the article at the receiving end, the receiving end terminating underneath a discharge end of a delivery chute.

33. The apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 32, wherein the discharge end of the conveyor belt terminates at a dispensing container for discharging the article, after the article is labelled, into the dispensing container.

34. The apparatus of claim 33, wherein the dispensing container includes a trapdoor located in a front cover of a pharmaceutical dispenser unit.

35. The apparatus of claim 34, wherein the pharmaceutical dispensing unit includes a patient interface in the front cover thereof.

36. The apparatus of claim 35, wherein the patient interface includes a screen, a microphone a speaker, a keypad and a card reader.

37. The apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 36, wherein the conveyor belt moves the article along underneath the label applicator for attaching the label and then underneath the resiliently deformable object for securely forcing the label onto the article.

38. The apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 37, wherein one or more alignment plates, an alignment actuator rod, an alignment actuator housing, and one or more alignment movement support blocks align the article to be labelled on the conveyor belt before a label is applied to the article.

39. The apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 38, wherein a suction device is located above the conveyor belt and which suction device includes the suction cup movable onto the article to attached to the article through negative vacuum pressure and to lift the article away from the conveyor belt by moving the suction cup away from the conveyor belt.