

Prescription Drug Medication Errors Can Be Prevented By Taking Some Common Sense Precautions

Ten Strategies Intended For Pharmacists Can Help Patients Stay Safe, Also

(Posted by Tom Lamb at www.DrugInjuryWatch.com on January 5, 2012; see <http://bit.ly/ABKoaH>)

It is relatively well-accepted in the healthcare community that medication errors involving prescription drugs happen more often than they should but the incident rate could be reduced if both pharmacists and patients took certain precautions.

The following set of precautions, from the an article "[Pharmacy Dispensing Mistakes: 10 Strategies for Minimizing Dispensing Errors](#)" that was published online by *Pharmacy Times* a couple of years ago, is intended for pharmacists but includes some points that can be helpful to patients.

Before we get to the list of ten ways that pharmacists might reduce the risk of causing or contributing to medication errors, here is some background about the problem generally from this *Pharmacy Times* article:

Dispensing errors include any inconsistencies or deviations from the prescription order, such as dispensing the incorrect drug, dose, dosage form, wrong quantity, or inappropriate, incorrect, or inadequate labeling. Also, confusing or inadequate directions for use, incorrect or inappropriate preparation, packaging, or storage of medication prior to dispensing are considered to be errors. Errors occur at a rate of 4 per day in a pharmacy filling 250 prescriptions daily, which amounts to an estimated 51.5 million errors out of 3 billion prescriptions filled annually nationwide. [footnotes omitted]

Now, here is the list of strategies for pharmacists to adopt in order to reduce the risk of causing a patient possible harm by means of a medication error:

1. Ensure correct entry of the prescription.
2. Confirm that the prescription is correct and complete.
3. Beware of look-alike, soundalike drugs.
4. Be careful with zeros and abbreviations.
5. Organize the workplace.
6. Reduce distraction when possible.
7. Focus on reducing stress and balancing heavy workloads.
8. Take the time to store drugs properly.
9. Thoroughly check all prescriptions.
10. Always provide thorough patient counseling.

This last point is especially important and, for the reasons set forth below, it is unfortunate that many patients are in too much of a hurry to take advantage of this service which is routinely offered and declined daily in pharmacies large and small.

Approximately 83% of errors are discovered during counseling and are corrected before the patient leaves the pharmacy. Therefore, it is important to go beyond offering to counsel and provide counseling for each patient. It is considered good practice to open the container and show the actual medication to the patient during counseling rather than deliver it to the patient in a sealed bag. Completing this process will provide an opportunity for the patient to see the medication and ask questions if it looks different from what he or she has been taking. Counseling should also include the instructions on how to take the medication and appropriate route of administration. Many dispensing errors are attributed to misunderstood directions for use. Educating patients about safe and effective use of their medication promotes patient involvement in their health care, which will likely reduce medication errors. [footnotes omitted]

In closing -- and this is the real take-away point for patients as regards the above list of prescription drug safety strategies -- while it may take a few more moments before leaving the pharmacy, one should always take advantage of the pharmacist-patient counseling session as the best final precaution for preventing possible harm from medication errors.

Attorney [Tom Lamb](#) represents people in personal injury and wrongful death cases involving unsafe prescription drugs or medication errors. The above article was posted originally on his blog, **Drug Injury Watch** – with live links and readers' Comments.
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