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Pharmacists campaign for legible prescriptions

Ahmed Kamel

THE Pharmacists' Syndicate has urged doctors nationwide to type prescriptions to avoid mistakes when patients get their medicines from pharmacies.

Pharmacists complain that unclear, handwritten prescriptions could lead to serious health repercussions for patients if they get wrong medicines.

Globally, the Washington DC-based Medical Institute estimated 7,000 people die worldwide annually due to illegible, handwritten prescriptions.

"I had an armpit abscess. I bought the medicine at a pharmacy, but then, after a week, I started to suffer from dizziness and the abscess even worsened. The doctor told me the chemist had given me the wrong medicine," said 50-year-old Abdulla Abdel Razeq, who has diabetes.

"The doctor said my blood sugar had shot up because of the medicine. But the chemist put the blame on the doctor's handwriting. He said it was hard to decipher."

There are no statistics for the number

of patients who get medicines that do not correspond to their doctor's prescriptions, but the poor handwriting of physicians has provoked pharmacists to call on doctors to type their prescriptions.

"As a pharmacist, I find it very difficult to read some of the prescriptions. So I ask the patients about their illnesses in an effort to decipher the prescription. This puts us in very awkward situations," said Michael Attia, owner and manager of a Cairo pharmacy.

"Doctors can easily use a computer to type their prescriptions. It would be easier for us. They should write the medicine required clearly as a mistake could be fatal."

The problem is particularly off-putting for new graduates of pharmacy, said Mai Ahmed, another chemist.

"Experienced pharmacists can usually decipher the prescriptions. But new graduates find it really hard to unravel unclear handwriting. I consult my seniors over illegible prescriptions to avoid mistakes. It would help a lot if the doctors used capital letters."

The Pharmacists' Syndicate has urged the government to oblige doctors to type their prescriptions.

"What are chemists to do? Should they work for a degree in decoding doctors' prescriptions as well? This is nonsense," said Ahmed Farouq, board member of the Pharmacists' Syndicate.

"Reading prescriptions requires experience. We train pharmacists on how to distinguish one drug from another when they have similar names. There should be clear-cut measures to ensure that prescriptions are easily understood by chemists."

He claimed that some doctors write prescriptions hastily because there are queues of patients in their clinics. But doctors put the blame on large numbers of patients, especially at state-run hospitals.

"Most doctors have long queues of patients. They are in a hurry," said Dr. Wafaa Alam El-Din, a dermatologist.

"Doctors want to cure their patients. Handwriting, good or bad, varies from person to person in all walks of life."



PHARMACISTS have been appealing to doctors to type prescriptions to avoid fatal mistakes when patients get their medicine.