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Pharmaceutical industry needs a revamp

Wael Salem

EGYPT'S healthcare sector suffers increasingly frequent drug shortages due to the economic troubles which followed the January 25, Revolution. Pharmacists and patients alike report acute shortages of both locally-produced and imported medicines.

New regulations for pharmaceutical registration and pricing are needed to revitalise the sector, Dr Reda Kassem, a pharmacist, said.

The industry's speed of growth is held up by the low prices for some drugs, he told **The Egyptian Gazette**. Some prices have not been changed for more than ten years. Then, there is a registration process that takes at least three years.

Another pharmacist, who declined to give his name, said that the country's fixed drug-pricing system, which makes it difficult for drug companies to cope with adverse financial circumstances, is a big cause of the shortages.

"But current shortages are mainly the result of the Egyptian pound's devaluation against the dollar. This has contributed to raising the cost of the imported raw materials needed for local manufacture."

A number of medical workers said the government needed to rescue the pharmaceutical industry. It would help many people with diabetes and blood pressure as well as those on medicines for heart, kidney and liver troubles.

"We cannot get hold of certain drugs to give to the patients, and this means

that we have to prescribe more expensive alternatives they are unable to buy," said Dr Reda Abdul Khaleq, a chemist working in one of the local pharmaceutical companies.

"The Ministry of Health, the pharmaceutical industry and the medical profession should speak with one voice to find rapid solutions for this crisis before it becomes even more difficult to tackle," Abdul Khaleq told this newspaper.

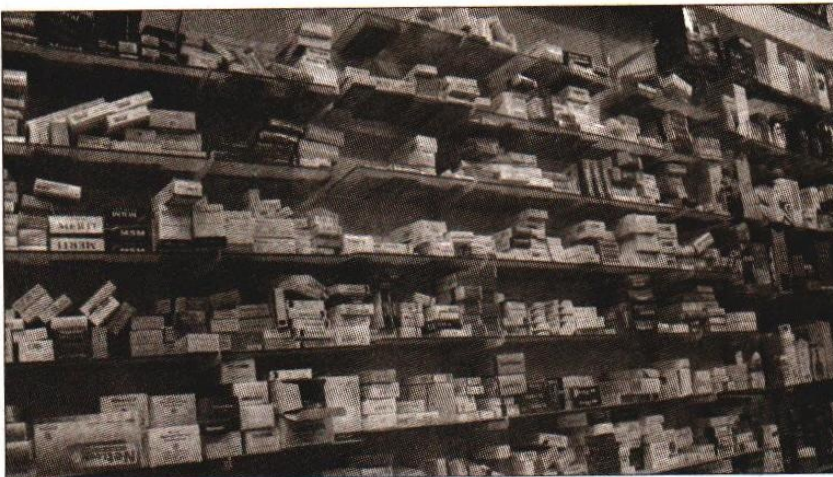
Dr Mahmoud Fouad, the manager of the Egyptian Centre for the Right to Medicine (ECRM), a non-governmental organisation (NGO), told *Al-Gomhuria* newspaper that some pharmaceutical companies in Egypt resort to pulling the cheap drug from the market as means to increasing its price.

Other companies, he said, prefer stop-

ping the production of certain drugs due to their meagre profits and produce alternative kinds, which are more expensive with the aim of achieving quick profit.

Dr Adel Abdel Maqsooud, the head of Pharmacists' Department, said that some monopolistic pharmaceutical companies may resort to reducing the main components of the cheap drugs that are used to treat chronic ailments, due to the increasing demand for them.

The only loser, at the end of the day, is the man who pays with his life for negligence, monopoly and apathy, he told the same newspaper. A great many people who have serious illnesses are fuming, since the basic drugs they depend on, are gradually disappearing from the market.



EGYPT'S fixed drug-pricing system makes it difficult for drug companies to cope with adverse financial circumstances.