

## What goes on behind the counter, anyway?

### Pharmacists make sure your prescriptions are safe, appropriate and effectively tailored for you

By: Beth Kessler

It's a typical Thursday afternoon and Mrs. T, who has been my patient for about a year, comes in to drop off her prescription. When we sit down to review the prescription for her bladder infection, I see that because of her reduced kidney function (due to her age of 86) the dosage of the antibiotic may be too high for her, which may contribute to serious side effects. I explain that I will consult with her doctor to adjust the dose.

After working with her doctor to optimize the dose and checking for potential drug interactions, I review with her how to take the medication properly, what to expect as it starts working and potential side-effects. I advise her that if there isn't an improvement in three days, to call me.

Mrs. T's story is not unique; it's one that plays out every day in the 9000 pharmacies across the country. Yes, we dispense medications, but we also make sure that your prescriptions are safe, appropriate, and effectively tailored for *you*. While you might not see everything we do behind the counter, be assured that we are helping Canadians get the most out of their medications. More than just pill counters, Canada's pharmacists provide value within the healthcare team, as the last check to prevent medication errors and potential drug interactions.

All these activities and more are funded by a dispensing fee – a modest, professional service fee that allows us the time to ensure the medications you receive are the safest and most appropriate for you.

While you wait for your medication, here's what we do: we confirm the medication and dose prescribed is optimal for you and the condition you are being treated for, we verify it does not interact with your other medications or disease states, and we make sure you won't experience an allergic reaction. We track your prescription in the provincial Pharmaceutical Information Program and we check your relevant lab values.

Canada's 40,000 pharmacists see over a million Canadians every day. More than half of patients with health care issues seek out a pharmacist *first*, before any other health care practitioner. Sometimes the pharmacist is the only healthcare provider in the community, especially in rural and remote Saskatchewan. We treat patients on the weekends and evenings and in many cases, 365 days a year and we are highly trusted by the public.

Although every province is different, pharmacists across the country are able to deliver more services compared to just a few years ago. From renewing prescriptions, administering vaccinations, educating on chronic diseases, providing medication reviews and prescribing for minor health conditions, Canada's pharmacists are doing "Pharmore" for their patients than ever before.

*Beth Kessler is a pharmacist in Regina Saskatchewan. March is Pharmacists Awareness Month, an opportunity to educate Canadians about the range of health care services pharmacists can provide.*