

# SECTION ON COMMERCIAL INTERESTS, AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION

## COMMERCIAL PHARMACY AND SIDE-LINES.\*

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There has been a great deal of discussion of Commercial Pharmacy, which included subjects and things in no way related to pharmacy. Commercial Pharmacy is the business or financial side of the profession of pharmacy. It is not the business of buying and selling things in a drug store altogether foreign to drugs and medicines.

We find that pharmacy deals with the preservation, preparation, identification and selection of drugs and medicinal preparations and articles. It embraces the preparing of certain substances for administration as medicines for the cure of disease, or to prevent disease. The list of things with which pharmacy is associated will be found in the Pharmacopoeia and standard works relating to pharmacy.

By Commercial Pharmacy we properly mean the very necessary business of buying drugs for legitimate use in the retail drug store, and the selling of the products for use in the treatment of disease. It, of course, includes a system of accounting, and the collection of debts, and the best method of securing money in exchange for the drugs we sell, to the end that pharmacists may have their just share of this world's goods. But Commercial Pharmacy does not mean the buying and selling of so-called side-lines. There is no pharmacy in such business, and while it may be commerce carried on in a drug store, it is not Commercial Pharmacy.

With pharmacy, as with any other profession, there is necessarily a business side to it. The evolution of things makes it essential that we obtain something of value in exchange for the drugs we sell, and since we must buy and pay for them, and live besides, we must, of course, make a profit. So then, Commercial Pharmacy is concerned with profit. It treats of its volume, and the way to make it as large as possible, and at the same time render our customers the very best service for their money.

I do not think any profession has an inherent right to live. I do not think, to borrow an old phrase, that the world owes us a living. I think we should earn the living, and the right to exist. Pharmacy, as well as all other professions, is a sort of privilege. We are granted a license that, in a way, sets us apart from other men. We are protected from unlimited competition, and in return for this we should, by right, render some service in return. We owe it to the public, to the people who grant us this privilege to give them our very best service, to make ourselves efficient, and to so conduct our business that we may give them the very highest service and best results for the money expended.

It is our duty, not only to know thoroughly all about the selection, identification, preservation and preparation of drugs, but we should know the business or financial side, so that we can give good drugs, and for the proper price. The

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\* Read before the Section on Commercial Interests, A. Ph. A., Atlantic City meeting, 1916.

pharmacist who is careless in his methods of purchasing, who is wasteful in handling drugs, who sells to some and gets no pay, must necessarily charge a higher price for his drugs to those customers who do pay. When he does this, he does wrong.

Commercial Pharmacy should be taught in the schools of pharmacy, and should be a prominent subject for discussion by every association of pharmacists. The pharmacist should be taught the economical methods of doing business, and if he will devote his time to that end he will secure greater financial success for himself, and at the same time serve his customers better than he will by devoting a lot of time to so-called side-lines. Our agricultural teachers are having a great deal to say about intensive farming. I know a farmer personally who produces more on twelve acres of land than the average farmer produces on three times twelve. I am convinced that there is opportunity for some intensive work in the profession of pharmacy, and in other professions as well.

Pharmacists should know all about the unprofessional things with which they must come in contact. By these I mean the things necessarily connected with the running of a modern drug store. Every pharmacist has to deal with the question of a store or shop. He should know how to get one in a desirable location for a proper rental, or if cheaper, own one. He should understand the question of proper ventilation, heating, lighting, etc. In many instances, several hundred dollars a year can be saved in rent, heat and light, merely by the proper utilization of space, location of lights, etc. More money can often be saved in this way than can be made from side-lines. Money can be saved in purchasing the right kind of fixtures and fixtures adapted to the business in hand, and the location. Fixtures for a smaller price oftentimes serve better than more expensive ones.

Practically all pharmacists have to contend with the item of clerk hire. This question is a very important one. Large establishments have men employed to make an expert study of this question. By getting the proper clerks, and assigning them to a certain line of work, and having a definite system, the pharmacist can frequently do more work better with a less number of clerks. My advice is to devote more study here and put in fewer side-lines.

The buying of drugs is entitled to much more consideration than is given by the average retail druggist. By taking advantage of discounts and other things common with the business world, a great deal of money can be saved in this department and can be reflected in increased profits, or in a reduced price to the consumer, as the pharmacist sees fit. Of course the selling end should receive expert attention, and the selling of drugs and not getting pay is a great expense in nearly all stores doing a credit business, that must be added to the selling price, or else settled in the bankruptcy court. The matter of a system of accounting and book-keeping is another department that may profitably receive attention.

I am not an advocate of the complete abandonment of side-lines by the druggists, but always let them be side-lines. The prescription department should not be the side-line and the selling of other things the principal business. I have not a high opinion of a pharmacist who is selling soda water, paint, window glass, newspapers, magazines, cutlery, kodaks, fruit, garden seed, athletic goods, running a luncheonette, and so on *ad infinitum*. I always think that a pharmacist carrying on all these things, is not devoting much time to his profession, and if I were the layman I would go elsewhere for my drugs.

There are certain things that custom has decreed that the druggist should handle and are a part of almost every drug store. But I believe we should discourage the addition of new lines to the drug store and rather reduce the number. Drug stores usually have soda fountains; personally, I do not favor it, however, we will concede that to the drug store. Surgical supplies and dressings properly belong to a drug store; perfumes are largely the product of chemical or pharmaceutical skill, and have come to be a part of the drug business as well as toilet articles of all kinds. We might concede the sale of cigars a place in a drug store. In my opinion, things along the lines indicated should be the end of the side-line business. The pharmacist should devote his time and energy to the things immediately connected with his business and improve that, and not compete with book-stores, hardware stores, department stores, restaurants, etc.

I find a general complaint from pharmacists that the general stores and department stores are taking away the business of the drug stores, but what of the other side of the picture? Can a general store be blamed for selling patent medicines and household remedies, when druggists sell knives, kodaks, fruit, paints, window glass, seed, etc.? If the energy and money spent in putting in side-lines and advertising them were spent in building up and running a drug store as it ought to be run, there would be created a distinct line of work that people would appreciate, and there would be no need of laws to protect the pharmacist in his work. If pharmacy was really made a distinct calling, and only those things handled in a drug store that reasonably form a part of such stock, it would only be a few years before the buying public would never think of purchasing cut rate medicines at a department store sale.

By economy and efficient service, a good many dollars can be saved each year, and also by care and judgment and system in the drug department. There are many leaks and wastes that can be avoided by careful, efficient attention to preservation and conservation of drugs, preparations, utensils and containers.

Some of my druggist friends tell me that there is no longer a profession of pharmacy, that it has become an indistinguishable part of a great mass of small businesses. However, we usually find that the store that is conducted properly is selling the largest percentage of drugs. This shows, to my mind, that the public still prefers a pharmacist to sell them medicines and not a department store.

I have in mind a kind of drug store that can and will succeed in any place where there is enough medicine sold to maintain a pharmacy. It is a store not too large and not too small for the goods it carries. It possibly has a cigar counter in the front, where a selected stock of cigars are sold. It is not a loafing place for gossipers. It is clean and neat, and well arranged. Its stock is not displayed like that of a racket-store, but is well arranged to suggest the articles carried, with the articles themselves kept so they will be preserved and not ruined or soiled by exposure to dirt, flies and light. There is an air of business, of sincerity. A customer instinctively feels that he is in a place where he can purchase an article and know that he is not being deceived; that everything handled and sold is just as represented and that every drug is just what it ought to be. He feels that it is presided over by a man who is supremely interested in his profession. I believe that such a store can succeed anywhere, and by taking this stand the principles of Commercial Pharmacy are rightly practiced.