

So our modern Tower of Babel is causing the transition from a "confusion of tongues" to a single language, spoken and understood by all, and is tending to hasten the millenium when the brotherhood of all mankind will finally be recognized and "swords will be beaten into ploughshares" for all time.

THE BUSINESS SIDE OF PHARMACY

This department is devoted to the discussion of problems of business administration and commercial policies relating to the various branches of pharmacy.

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"The greatest business asset of a modern pharmacy is a well-conducted prescription and drug department." This is not the statement of a theorist or of one whose intense interest in scientific pharmacy leads him to minimize the importance of the drug store as a distributing station for merchandise that is not allied to pharmaceuticals—even distantly. It is the statement, in substance, of a successful director of one of the largest drug stores in the third largest city of the United States. He knows whereof he speaks from many years of daily experience in an establishment that has served the public in practically one location for sixty-five years.

In a paper read before the Section of Commercial Interests of the American Pharmaceutical Association at Cleveland, he reminded those who are engaged in the retail drug business that there is such a thing as keeping step with the advancing times without losing step with certain firmly set professional principles that are as old as pharmacy itself and which none who are in the drug business to-day can afford to ignore. The key-note of the only sane policy for the retail drug store of to-day is to keep the prescription department the heart of the business.

Can and does the prescription department pay? It certainly can, but whether it does or not depends on the man who is running it. Modern business takes it for granted that no service is rendered and no goods are sold without a direct profit although such a direct profit may at times come to the business man by indirect means. We have been treated from time to time with newspaper articles charging pharmacists with profiteering on prescriptions because the person who preferred the charges found out that ingredients of a prescription can sometimes be purchased individually at a low price which to his mind was all out of proportion to the charge made by the apothecary for the finished product. If the same type of reasoning were followed in arriving at the proper charges for anything else besides prescriptions, every business man would by the same token be a profiteer.

The general attitude of pharmacists who seek to avoid charges of profiteering by making prescription prices ridiculously low, is to be deplored. Any department that is to retain the interest of the druggist and receive a large share of his attention must be profitable. When druggists shake their heads in despair and give voice to their disgust by saying that they wish they could get rid of their prescription departments entirely because they do not pay, they are beginning to follow the line of least resistance and they discourage the most vital part of the drug store's work.

If, on the other hand, the figures show that the prescription department is

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not paying its way and the pharmacist decides to find out the reason why and goes over the cost and receipt figures carefully and finds that it is because he has not kept his charges for professional work up to the ratio which will yield a fair profit and he proceeds to correct that condition by making proper charges for his professional services, he is putting his store on a decent, high-grade, professional service plane which will undoubtedly result in financial success.

People as a whole realize that professional service cannot be rendered cheaply and they immediately suspect the man who is "cheap."

There ought to be a better understanding of the costs of compounding, including clerk hire, overhead and other factors which every business man includes in the cost of his goods, and it would not be at all amiss to let the public see such figures so that the profiteering charge that is sometimes hurled at the drug store may be boldly and completely refuted. The cost of the ingredients is all that some pharmacists consider as definite in figuring the cost of a prescription. Then they add a figure to the cost which they think will cover other factors and yield a profit. This is purely guess work and is arrived at largely by the quantity of the prescription, its nature and possibly the amount of time consumed in compounding it. No other class of business men would arrive at the selling price of a commodity or a service in that way. It is very unbusiness-like, careless, haphazard and indeed it may well lead to overcharging as well as undercharging.

The only corrective for this condition is a thorough study of the cost factors and what constitutes a legitimate profit. This is a subject that should be discussed at some length by pharmaceutical organizations everywhere in order that a fairly uniform and sufficiently high scale of prices may be arrived at.

Cost factors that should be discussed in making up a fair prescription price schedule should include the cost of ingredients, a fair profit on the ingredients, cost of container, a proportion of the overhead of the store which should be a fixed amount to cover rent, light, heat, salaries, etc., a compounding fee including proper checking of ingredients and based on the time of all persons involved, a fee to cover packaging and delivery and finally a service charge to cover special record keeping, reports, etc.

No salesman whether he sells goods or service can have any confidence in his prices unless he knows costs. It is such knowledge which makes it possible for him to refute false accusations as to alleged profits, and allows him to meet his customer in a straightforward manner inviting a discussion of his costs and explaining the necessity for the details of service when the situation calls for such discussion. Furthermore such knowledge properly displayed at the right time by the salesman, in this case the pharmacist, inspires his customer with confidence in his ability, judgment and fairness.

Certainly this question of proper charges for prescription work is one of the most important to which the thought of pharmacists could be directed at this time, and doubtless a proper financial reward for this portion of the drug business will stimulate interest in the professional side of the calling. At the present time the apathy of some pharmacists toward the pharmaceutical end of their business constitutes one of the chief menaces to progress in the professional side of the retail drug business. Possibly a full consideration of the problem of prescription pricing holds a remedy for this apathy.