

COPIES OF PRESCRIPTIONS.*

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It is an every-day occurrence in a pharmacy that a copy of a prescription is asked for. Frequently patients move away from the neighborhood or care to make a change for other reasons. When the patient calls for a copy, I find that the most satisfactory method is to give him same, without any further arguments or comments. Oftentimes the physician asks the patient to get such a copy for his own information, quite especially when a change in doctors has been made.

That the patient is rightly entitled to a copy of his prescription, that is of an ordinary *but not of a narcotic prescription*, has been decided by the courts on several occasions. Why not? After all the patient has paid the physician for his advice and the resulting prescription. He can have this prescription compounded at any pharmacy and demand that the original, his property, should be returned to him. Of late years, physicians frequently specify that this prescription is not to be repeated and also that no copy is to be given. If this is the case then the pharmacist should honor the wish of the physician. Consequently, it is "up" to the medical profession to prevent the custom, if not the abuse, of the refilling and the copying of prescriptions.

For years I, and no doubt other pharmacists, have adopted a rule to make a memorandum on prescriptions: "Copy given on such a date." I have instructed my clerks and apprentices to do this and I have always taught my students in the College to practise this simple system. The advantages of this precaution are obvious, namely, a permanent record and the prevention of giving copies indefinitely.

During the past few years I have paid particular attention to copies of prescriptions, which were received at my pharmacy as well as other drug stores. To my surprise, to my great surprise, I have learned, not from hearing but from actual observance, that some pharmacists are in the habit, in the bad habit, of *writing copies of prescriptions on blank pieces of paper, which do not bear their name or address.*

Such practice is abominable and detestable; it is a discredit, in fact, a disgrace to pharmacy. And why such an evasion, such a shirking of responsibility? Simply because the druggist, the timid, the over-timid druggist is afraid of being *under-priced by his brother* pharmacist. Truly a brotherly love indeed!

But this is not all! Copies are given in such an illegible handwriting, that they are difficult to decipher and may be the cause of misinterpretation and even mistakes which might be fatal. It is obvious that such cryptographs are given intentionally, so as to hinder another pharmacist from filling the prescription. I even know of a case in my own experience when I received a copy of a prescription, without name and address in which merely the ingredients were given, *but not the quantities.* Upon telephoning the druggist, after obtaining his address from the patient, I received the great satisfaction that he blamed his clerk for this negligence. or still better, this trick.

It is this shifting of responsibility, this shirking of accountability and the consequent irresponsibility which at the present day is one of the great dangers, if not

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the curse in pharmacy. It is high time that pharmacists wake up to this fact and better their conditions and better themselves.

Now as to the lesson in my paper. It has the following object. Let the New York State Pharmaceutical Association be the father of a bill or an amendment to the Pharmacy Law providing the following:

1. Copies of prescriptions must be true copies.

2. Must be written distinctly.

3. Must bear the name and address of the pharmacy or the pharmacist who compounded the prescription and who gave the copy.

Such provisions are fair and square and are needed badly. They must come, the sooner the better, for the protection of the public health and safety.

Let the Empire State lead the way, and no doubt other states will follow!

NITROGEN: ITS VIRTUES AND ITS VICIES.

It is strange to think that we live by breathing an atmosphere containing 80 percent of nitrogen which in certain combinations is dealing out death on an appalling scale. There are practically no useful explosives employed in which the action of nitrogen is not concerned. Without its aid the great ships at sea could not be sunk, or innocent victims on land killed, or property destroyed by the aeroplane and dirigible, while it serves to mow down whole columns of men in the field, for rifles, howitzers, machine-guns, and grenades are all dependent upon, and made terribly deadly by, the offices of nitrogen. We every day pass on to our lungs something like 450 gallons of nitrogen per 24 hours, which would be enough to make 30 pounds of tri-nitro-toluol, or 40 pounds of gun-cotton. In our early training in the elements of chemistry we were wont to regard nitrogen as a singularly uninteresting gas on account of its negative behavior. It did not burn like hydrogen, it did not support combustion like oxygen, and, in short, its presence was generally assumed because of its inactivity and because it did not directly respond to any test. And yet this element is the greatest of all as a munition power; it is hardly an exaggeration to say that applied nitrogen is going to be a factor in deciding the issue of the war. It is remarkable, also, that this element forms the central figure in the protein group or tissue-repairing material of our foods. To say that without protein we die, practically means that without nitrogen we die. The gas without positive tests is as necessary in one form for our support as in other forms it is ready to destroy us. Nitrogen's power depends in the first place on the fact that it carries in oxygen to compounds which are thus rendered explosive, turning all the elements into a huge volume of gas, itself being set free. The very inertness of nitrogen, or its objection to affinity, means that on the least provocation it will easily release its partner oxygen, handing this over to the combustion of other elements present, with the formation of volumes of gases, the nitrogen returning to what is apparently its congenial condition, the free state. As a fertilizer in the soil nitrogen acts as a stimulant and supplies the necessary nitrogen to the plant. In other words, it is a plant food. Thus the remarkable thing about nitrogen above all other elements is its power to destroy life or to sustain it according to the associates with which it is in company. With certain accomplices it forms death-dealing explosives, with others it becomes a nutritive material. It is the essentially romantic element, devil or god, according to its associations.—Abstracted from *The Lancet*.
