

Pharmacists aren't just bottle fillers

By **CARLA COBB**

Health Matters

When you stop in for a quick oil change, the friendly staff not only changes the oil but also checks your windshield wipers, tires, hoses, belts, fluids and more. You may not even realize that they have gone through this thorough check, unless they find that something has gone wrong.

This is much like what happens behind the scenes when you drop off a prescription at your pharmacy. Although you may be in a hurry to get your prescription filled, what the pharmacists are doing behind the scenes may save your life. Pharmacists have gone to college for at least six years to study all aspects of correct medication use and safety. They find dozens of medication-related problems every day when filling prescriptions.

Some of the tasks the pharmacist is performing of which you may not be aware include:

Checking your prescription to make sure that the drug and dose are correct for you based on other illnesses, medication, or laboratory tests. He will look for any problems that may be caused by mixing medications with other prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbs, nutritional supplements, foods, and even if it safe to take the medication if you smoke or drink caffeine or alcohol.

Checking to see if you have any allergies to the prescription medication or have had any side effects or bad reactions to this or similar medications in the past.

Choosing the correct medication bottle from shelves of hundreds of products and checking to make sure the correct tablets are in your prescription bottle.

If the prescription is for a child, checking to make sure that the dose is correct, based on the child's age and weight.

Choosing a liquid or tablet form of the medication, or adding a flavor to make it easier for a child to take.

Compounding a medication tailored specifically for you, such as personalized hormone replacement.

Checking to make sure that the label on the prescription bottle has the correct directions, and putting the safety cap on to make sure that your child doesn't get into it.

Answering phone calls from physicians for new prescriptions and from people needing refills.

Answering questions from people who need more information about how to take their medication correctly or who are having problems or side effects from their medication.

Recommending over-the-counter medications for people who need help in choosing from the hundreds of products on the pharmacy shelves, and making sure that it is safe to take with other medications.

Contacting your insurance company to see if your medication will be covered.

Offering flu shots, blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, or thyroid hormone testing.

Providing helpful information about the medication to help you know what to expect.

If the pharmacist detects one of these medication concerns, he may need to take the time to call your doctor and discuss a solution to the problem.

Surprised by what goes on behind the scenes? Next time you visit your pharmacist please be sure to thank him or her for saving lives - yours or someone you love.

And please be patient when it takes a bit longer than you thought to "just put a few pills in a bottle."

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