LEGACY ARTICLES

What Can We Do in Our Locality to Acquaint the Public with the Service Pharmacy Renders?¹

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The value of the service rendered to the public by the pharmacist is recognized today to a far greater extent than ever before. This is an important sign of progress, but there is still much to be done to impress the significance of this service upon the popular mind and to disabuse people of erroneous ideas of pharmacies and their place in the economy of things.

Charters has said, "*A well-informed pharmacist is the best single individual to disseminate information about public health.*" This is undoubtedly true and few people realize how much information is furnished and how much assistance is rendered by the pharmacist without any charge whatsoever. While the physician deals with individual cases of illness, prescribing for and treating the patients, the drug store serves as a kind of clearing house for general information on health, aside from being the source of supply from which not only medicines are obtained, but also, sanitary and toilet goods and many other closely related articles.

It is our duty to stress constantly the added dignity and usefulness of the pharmacy in the present scheme of things. This is already recognized to a considerable extent, but should be recognized still more. Pharmacists themselves can assist materially in getting such recognition. This can be done in conversations, with customers and personal acquaintances, in well-phrased advertising, and in the attitude of the clerks and other employees of drug stores.

It needs no elaboration to show the contrast between the drug store of a few decades ago, limited to the sale of old time remedies, for the most part, and often dingy and uninviting in appearance, and the modern, attractive pharmacy with its astonishingly wide range of merchandise. The present pharmacy, besides being a public health agency, is also a public institution as indispensable as the fire department and the public school, the chief distinction being that

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¹Read at the 1939 Meeting of District Number 5, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

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it is privately owned and managed. In fact, the clients or patients of the pharmacy far outnumber those who utilize the services of the public school or the fire department. As a matter of fact, everybody or nearly everybody patronizes the pharmacy at one time or another, and a large share of people do so almost daily.

Sometimes reference is made in a humorous vein to the fact that the modern pharmacy is virtually a department store, because it sells nearly everything. This, of course, is no reflection on the pharmacy. On the contrary, it is evidence of the key position that the pharmacy occupies in modern life. Just because it occupies that position, it has so rapidly become the place where one can buy such a large variety of useful goods.

When the matter is considered carefully, it will be found that a great proportion of the commodities on sale in drug stores are related directly or indirectly to health—therefore, they are on sale in the logical place. Toothbrushes, toothpaste and powder, safety razors and blades, shaving cream and soap, talcum powder, perfume, toilet water, nail files and clippers, electric heaters, and electric fans—these are just a few of the multitude of things I might enumerate which are found in pharmacies as a rule and all of which, on reflection, have a distinct bearing on the matter of health. They are not drugs, to be sure, but they are certainly factors in keeping people clean and well and comfortable. A survey of the merchandise of average pharmacies will reveal that this principle holds true for the most part. And where articles on sale have little or no connection with health in any way, it must be remembered that it is the natural and proper policy to sell anything in common use which can be exhibited and sold conveniently in such a store, simply because the drug store is the one place visited by almost everyone in the neighborhood, sooner or later. In this respect, it is distinct from the clothing store, the shoe shop, the restaurant, the tailor shop, etc. They are visited infrequently by many people but there is almost nobody who does not go rather often to the nearest pharmacy. It goes without saying that the pharmacy, modernized, expanded and rendered more attractive, is just the spot in which such a variety of goods should be available to the average man or woman.

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Soda fountains in drug stores date back many years to a period long before the modernization of the pharmacy. Thousands of drug stores all over the United States now sell a splendid array of books and periodicals, frequently offering famous classics and valuable reference works at extremely low prices. The benefit to the public from this service can hardly be overestimated, but we receive no favorable publicity from this fact. On the other hand at this time we are receiving adverse criticism for the sale of indecent literature. Through the sale of the better type of literature, there is a distinct bearing on health, for worthwhile reading matter is certainly indispensable to mental health which, in turn, is closely related to physical health. So once more the pharmacy is filling an important civic need.

Above and beyond these community services that are so helpful and convenient, is the fundamental service to health itself. The countless cases in which the pharmacist aids his suffering neighbors, often at great inconvenience to himself and not infrequently without compensation or even mention, are an inextricable part of the heroic history of every neighborhood.

The Saturday Evening Post and other magazines prior to Pharmacy Week last October published a striking advertisement of Parke, Davis & Co., headed, "*The Story The Papers Didn't Print.*" An extract is worth quoting, for it applies to so many other pharmacists everywhere.

"There were a lot of things Hal Barnes could have told the papers the day he retired. Out of the worn, leather-bound books that held all the prescriptions he'd compounded in the past 40 years, he could have given them intimate glimpses into the lives, the crises, the heart-breaks of almost everybody in town. If he chose, old Hal could have pointed to those tragic pages that told of despair, tragedy, and heroism the time the town was visited by the devastating flood.

"But Hal Barnes doesn't talk about these things. You can't get a word out of him about his 40 years of service to the community. He'll brag about the perch he caught in Silver Lake, or the pheasant he shot last week, or what the Chamber of Commerce is doing for the town. But never a peep out of him about those emergency calls in the night—about the hours spent at his prescription counter helping alleviate pain and disease and often battling with death itself.

"Hal knew that illness never takes a vacation—and, somehow, he never seemed to find time to take very many himself. Now he's getting a real one, and he's earned it. A plain man, but skilled in his profession, with an intimate knowledge of hundreds of different drugs, and a deep-rooted ideal of service to the neighbors and friends who made up his world.

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"It is a fine thing for America that Hal has his counterpart in thousands of communities throughout the land."

Like Hal Barnes, the average pharmacist does innumerable deeds of mercy and assistance for neighbors, acquaintances, and strangers, but feels in duty bound not to mention them. We represent millions of accumulated and invested capital. We employ thousands and thousands of employees. We distribute uncounted wages which is the material bread of life and turn the wheels of manufactories.

Nor do I forget that there is in us something of the Good Samaritan, who poured the oil and wine; and that our work goes to the healing of human suffering, the finding of new and more helpful agencies for securing help and repelling disease, and to the holding up of the hands of the physician and surgeon, whose ministry is akin to that of Him who ministers to the needs of the human soul. We have the sweetest of all rewards, the consciousness of helping humanity; of somehow, somewhere, making someone happier and better by bringing sleep to a tired eyelid, by bringing rest to an exhausted brain, by bringing relief to pain, cure to disease, and health to infirmity.

We of the pharmaceutical profession hide our light under a bushel in so far as individual acts are concerned. But this does not mean that we should neglect to impress upon the public the inestimable value of the service performed by pharmacies generally. It is only justice to ourselves and fair to the community that this service should be appreciated. In our business and personal contacts, in our advertising, and in every legitimate way, attention should be called to this service.

Special opportunities in this direction arise now and then, as in the observance of National First Aid Week. At that time, every retail pharmacist should do his part in publicizing first aid to the people of his community. The pharmacist who is alert should identify his store as first aid headquarters. Organizations likely to be interested in first aid week should be contacted—the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, The National Safety Council, The Red Cross, the schools, and the newspapers. Cooperation from the schools should be arranged early in the season, so that it may be fitted into teaching schedules. Local essay contests, a highly successful means of impressing National First Aid Week

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and its teachings upon youngsters and their parents, should be got under way soon. Club schedules should be consulted to determine if there are openings for speakers on first aid subjects. All of these may be arranged with little difficulty if the pharmacist is watchful for opportunities.

The Fourteenth Annual Pharmacy Week was the most successful and the most generally observed in our history. Significant were the Pharmacy Week messages of President Roosevelt, and also of President Carrington of the New Jersey Medical Society that the week was "A commendable educational effort to impress upon the public the place of the pharmacist in the preservation of public and individual health."

In a general way, the same rule for increasing respect and esteem for our profession holds good that applies to any other profession. But there is the difference that ours is a necessary profession and a service that is frequently most urgent—that many times is the only barrier between life and death. There are a lot of stores and shops that the community can manage to get along without, but it cannot well function without the pharmacy. We are, therefore, doing what is fundamentally essential to the public welfare. Changed economic conditions have also resulted in our doing many other things which are not absolutely essential but which contribute vastly to the convenience and comfort of people. We have a right to genuine pride in our usefulness, in the dignity of our work, and in the duty and charm that characterize the modern, efficient pharmacy as distinguished from the forbidding looking drug store of the past with its pungent odors of old time medicines and its atmosphere suggestive of discomfort and pain rather than of health and cheer. The drug store of 1939 has no more similarity to that of a few score years ago than a handsome parlor illuminated by electricity has to a dirty store room lighted with a tallow candle.

Every citizen engaged in useful, honorable activity should feel proud of his occupation. The pharmacist, however, has a greater right to such self-satisfaction than have members of many other vocations. He belongs to the front ranks from the standpoint of social advancement. To him, the community owes a debt such as it owes to the fireman who risks his life to save a fellow human from a burning building

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and to the nurse who helps the sick person travel slowly and laboriously a road back to health. Furthermore, he must be a walking encyclopedia of information regarding points of interest in his city, train and street car schedules, location of principal buildings, theater attractions, and everything else concerning which the public may inquire. He must also keep on hand a supply of stamps and enough money to change all the ten and twenty dollar bills circulating in the neighborhood.

He must be courteous and tactful, and at the same time be able to determine what a customer wants when he doesn't know himself. An old lady came into a store one evening recently and asked for a box of canine pills. "What's the matter with the dog?" inquired the druggist, wishing to be of the utmost service. "I want you to understand, sir," she explained indignantly, "that my husband is a gentleman."

The precise methods by which we should strengthen our position in different communities will vary widely and each must work them out for himself. But first of all, we as individual pharmacists must paint for the public the correct picture of our public health service and we can do that by making the prescription department a part of our store with ware and apparatus accurate, immaculate, and aseptic. This same spirit should be reflected in all departments. To the consumer, this means simply better health protection in a variety of ways. Someday the public will demand of all retail stores that they be clean and well equipped, adequately lighted, and conveniently arranged for sanitary display of merchandise. The pharmacy, which has never lost its influence as a community gathering place, is leading this parade.

All of the time, we must keep in mind how much more important is our role in the community than was that of the earlier pharmacists, living up to the increased obligations and winning added appreciation and affection among our patrons and other acquaintances. As a consequence, we shall steadily gain in popular esteem and gratitude. This will be the best advertising we can ever secure. It will entrench us in the hearts of our neighbors more firmly than could any other procedure.