

Script - Print - Mitigating Medicine Mistakes

How you can avoid harmful prescription errors

More than 100,000 Americans die each year of adverse drug reactions, according to a landmark report in the Journal of the American Medical Association. That makes such reactions one of the six leading causes of death in the U.S.

How many of those deaths are the result of errors in dispensing drugs is uncertain, but pharmacy mistakes may play a role. When researchers analyzed more than 9,800 prescriptions filled at a large hospital's outpatient pharmacy in Springfield, New Jersey, for example, they found over 1,300 mistakes, ranging from bottles containing the wrong pills or the wrong dosage to labeling errors. In other words, mistakes were made in roughly one in eight of the prescriptions.

Despite all the technology - such as bar codes and computer confirmations - the filling of prescriptions is still a human process. Mistakes can be made.

But, some of the responsibility falls to the patient, especially when it comes to knowing the medication your taking - from the type, dosage and color.

"The tablets, depending on where you buy them from, different manufacturers - there could be many different manufacturers," says Kyle Shick, OSF HealthCare Regional Pharmacy Director. "That's why the bar code scanning is really important. Because they could look different, but still contain the same medication. I think, if you're on a lot of different medications, it is difficult to see what's - and so it's always good to ask."

Asking your pharmacist comes first with getting to know them. Schick advises that you have all your medicines filled at the same pharmacy for continuity and familiarity with your pharmacist and their team.

"Taking advantage of the pharmacist counseling before you leave the pharmacy - that is one - you know - some, a lot of the errors get caught too - is that last step, when the pharmacist is spending more time with you to explain everything," says Kyle Shick, OSF HealthCare Regional Pharmacy Director. "And that's another way to discover if there's some kind of medication error."

By law pharmacists are required to provide counseling on any and all prescription drugs.

It's equally important for you to give your pharmacist all the information they need. In addition to understanding exactly what you're taking and why, tell the pharmacist what other drugs or supplements you're taking to avoid any harmful interactions.