

The Challenges of a Pharmacist in Palestine

By Muna Sabri



have been raised in a “pharmaceutical” family. My father is a pharmacist, and he motivated and encouraged me to go into pharmaceutical medicine. Not so long ago, people used to consider the pharmacy to be a holy place, and they would approach the pharmacist as they would a doctor. Even in the midst of “competition” from folk medicine practitioners and herbal medicine, the pharmacist was considered one of the wise elders of the village or city.

Today, though, things are very different. In the eyes of the general

Pharmacy of Fakhri Geday, interior, Jaffa. Courtesy of Palestine Remembered.



There are 2,430 registered pharmacists in the West Bank, the majority of whom (a bit more than 93 percent) work in the private sector.* The pharmaceutical sector in Palestine attempts to compete with both foreign and Israeli industries, despite the few available resources and the fact that many pharmaceutical drugs today are being smuggled from Israel into the West Bank.**

community, pharmacists are little more than drug traders and similar in many ways to convenience-store owners. People visit the pharmacy to purchase medicine in much the same way as they would go to a store to buy groceries. Pharmacists are rarely seen as sources of information and advice about proper use of medication.

Pharmacists and pharmaceutical medicine face many challenges in Palestine. In spite of the increasing number of pharmacy graduates, it is still difficult to recruit pharmacists since the majority of the graduates are female, and they prefer to stay home after marriage. In addition, there is very little incentive to work as a pharmacist, given the very low salary range for pharmacists in Palestine.

As in many developing countries, private pharmacies offer the largest stock and variety of medication as compared with governmental pharmacies that have very limited supplies. The variety of medication that is in stock in private pharmacies presents a challenge in itself, though, due to the high cost of these medications and the deteriorating economy in Palestine. Moreover, the political situation has a significant effect on the cost and availability of medication.

Another contributing factor to the decreased status of pharmacists is the fact that many physicians seem to have forgotten the importance and role of the pharmacist. In many cases, a pharmacist's role remains restricted to deciphering physicians' handwriting on prescriptions. Doctors generally frown upon the pharmacist who takes time to speak with patients about medication side effects or who replaces the doctor's drug choice with the equivalent generic drug.

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* <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2690900/#B2>

** <http://www.thisweekinpalestine.com/details.php?id=2157&edid=142>