

PHARMACY



By Senior Airman Michael Duhe
437 AW Public Affairs

The issue of fatal medical errors has been in the news lately. The base pharmacy is determined to make sure those errors don't occur here.

The base pharmacy is a section of the 437th Medical Group's Diagnostics and Therapeutics Flight, which also includes the laboratory and radiology. It is staffed by two pharmacists and six technicians. Capt. Royce Terry, officer-in-charge of the pharmacy, said a number of volunteers also help out at the pharmacy.

"We have lots of volunteers," he said. "They're a big part of our operation. We're working right now to try to expand their duties. We've seen our workload increase because the Navy Hospital has curtailed its services."

The mission of the pharmacy is to support physicians providing health care throughout the Department of Defense. The pharmacy's customers include a broad spectrum of DoD beneficiaries, including active duty and Reserve military members and their families. Military retirees make up a large portion of pharmacy customers, according to Terry.

"The pharmacy is a benefit people don't want to give up in a time of change," Terry commented. "It's a great benefit. We try to do as much as we can with the work and money we have."

Last year, the pharmacy filled 137,000 prescriptions. Terry said the pharmacy strives to be "fast, efficient and without error" in filling prescriptions. They double check prescriptions and check for possible patient allergy interactions. Customers can also take steps to help avoid mistakes, such as:

- Learn as much as they can about their condition and the medicine they're taking. "Being well informed is probably the biggest thing a patient can do to make sure they're getting the right medicine or being treated the right way," Terry said.

- If a patient has a question about medication, don't hesitate to ask a physi-

cian or pharmacist.

- Check the directions on medication each time a prescription is filled, even if it is the same medicine, because dosages may change.

- Different manufacturers produce the same medicines, but the pills may be a different color. Call the pharmacy if pills look different to make sure it's the same medicine.

- If patients experience symptoms such as itching or swelling after taking a dose of a new prescription, customers should seek medical advice.

- Keep all prescriptions away from children and be careful with disposing medicine. "I've heard of patients using those nicotine patches and throwing them in the trash," Terry said. "If a dog gets a hold of them, you've got a problem on your hands."

- Keep a log of prescriptions in case of emergency, such as hospitalization.

- Have a medical ID or bracelet listing allergies.

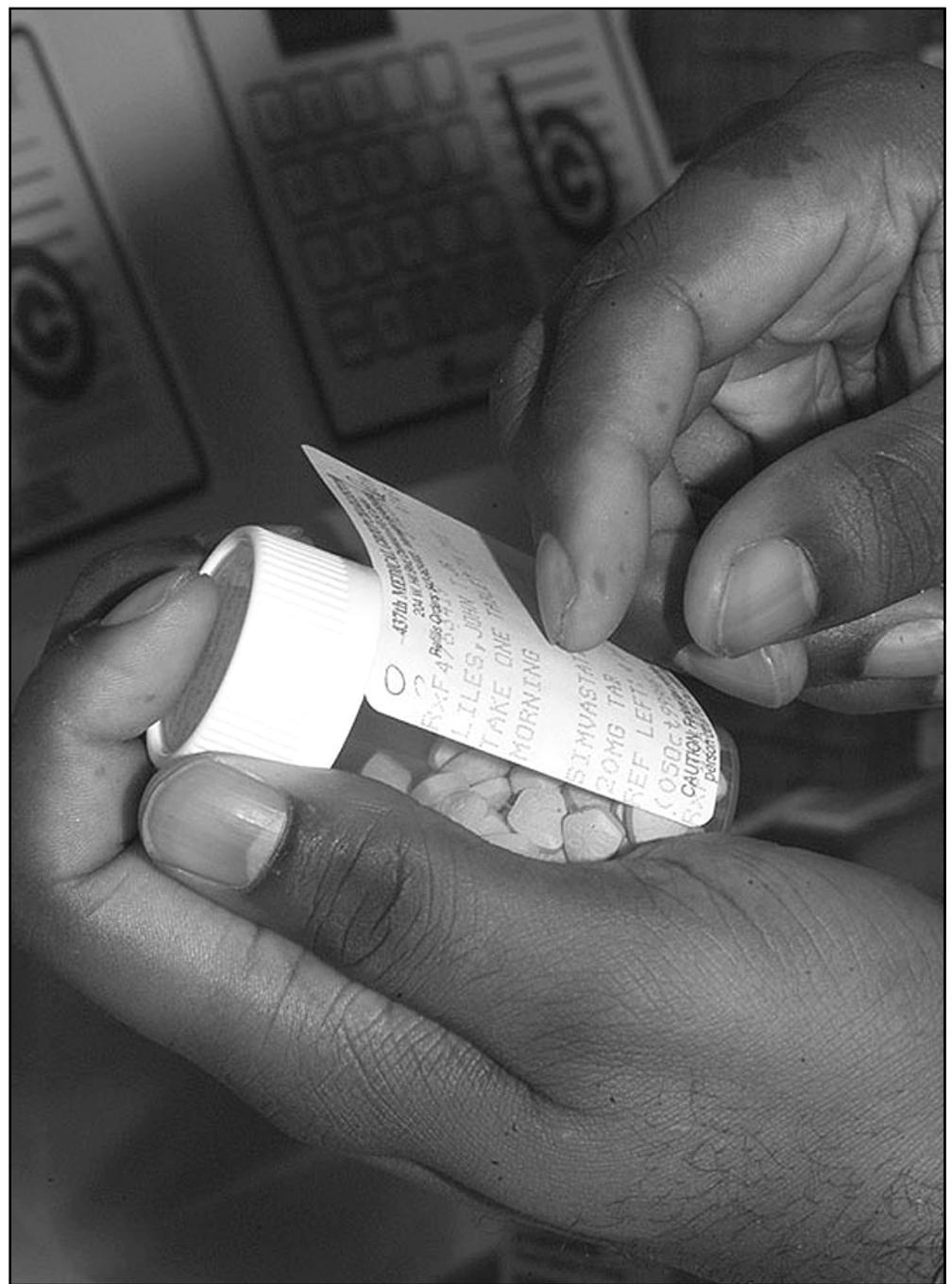
- Because over-the-counter medications can interact with prescriptions, mention to your physician or pharmacist if you're taking over-the-counter medicine.

To avoid medical mistakes, such as an incorrect prescription because of unclear handwriting, many of the clinic's physicians fill out a prescription on a computer system linked to the pharmacy.

Another safeguard in the pharmacy involves a container-filling system known as Baker cell. Each cell holds a certain type of medication, such as penicillin pills. A pharmacy staffer punches in the number of pills needed, and the system dispenses the exact number. "Baker cell is a quality effort to prevent error," Terry explained. "The accuracy, the efficiency...it's second to none."

The future of the pharmacy will lie in robotics, which will use bar codes on both the cell and the original container to ensure accuracy in filling a prescription.

"We do all we can to prevent that error from occurring in the pharmacy, but the loop isn't complete until the patient is involved in their therapy," Terry said.



photos by Staff Sgt. Andrew Rodier

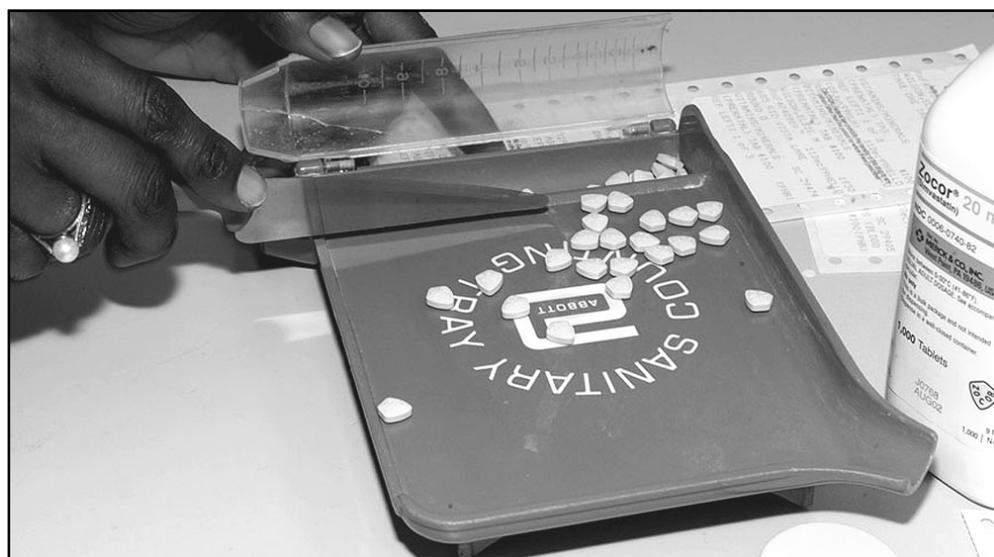
The base pharmacy filled 137,000 prescriptions in 1998.



Above, Kim Zelner-Green, a pharmacy technician, refills a container in the Baker cell system, which accurately and efficiently dispenses medication. The pharmacy relies on technology to better serve customers.



At left, the pharmacy keeps a plentiful supply of prescription medication containers.



The pharmacy fills prescriptions for a wide range of DoD beneficiaries.