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# Capital case for legible prescriptions

The Government is all set to make it mandatory for doctors to write their prescriptions in capital letters

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A doctor's prescription, it is said, is best understood by the neighbourhood chemist, but times are changing. Sorry, this is illegible. It seems to be some antibiotic drug," V Ramesh, a Hyderabad-based businessman, was told by a popular pharmacy.

The hand-written prescription with the name of the medicine and its dosage, was no more than illegible jottings. This is an experience not unla-

miliar to consumers across the country.

## Block letters

But this may soon become a practice of the past. The Government is all set to make it mandatory for doctors to write their prescriptions in capital letters. A

draft to this effect has already been sent by the Medical Council of India (MCI) to the Government.

"The process is on and we ex-



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pect this to be issued very soon," said a senior official with the MCI's ethics section. Pharmacists agree that there is a serious

problem with longhand prescriptions. "Actually, we are decoding agents. Most of our sales staff dread reading the prescriptions," says A Rambabu, who runs Akunuri Medicals in Hyderabad.

## Nalgonda case

In fact, it is a pharmacist from Nalgonda in Telangana, Chilkuri Paramathma, who is largely behind the imminent change, along with some NGOs.

He doggedly pursued the matter, compiled a list of over 100 pairs of drugs which sounded similar and were spelt differently by a single letter, but were used for different ailments.

He then followed this up with the State medical organisations, MCI, and several key authorities under the Health Ministry, including the regulatory, Drug Controller General of India.

After four years of pursuit, he filed a PIL in the Andhra Pradesh High Court. And earlier this year, a two-member Bench of the Court comprising Chief Justice Kalyan Jyothi Sengupta and Justice Sanjay Kumar issued directions to the MCI to take appropriate steps.

## Ban plea

The pharmacist's plea was to ban the running hand-writing style in prescriptions, as pharmacists were unable to understand them and ended up dispensing the wrong medicines. For instance, Microgest prescribed for a woman to help

with her pregnancy, was read by the pharmacist as Misoprostol, which can cause an abortion.

## MCI prescribes

The Centre's approval is awaited on the MCI's draft directing doctors to prescribe in capital letters. It will become mandatory for doctors, once the Centre gives its nod.

Dr Mandeep Singh, Apollo Hospitals Director (Medical Services), points out that all prescriptions for its in-patients are in typed formats. "In the next six months, we aim to extend this to out-patients as well," he added.

But in smaller establishments run by neighbourhood doctors, it may be easier to opt for a less expensive change in habit — from running hand-writing to all-caps!

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