

Drug thefts, fraud on the rise

By ALANA PERKINS
Times staff writer

Walter Sommerfeldt is angry and he has decided he won't take it any more.

After six robberies at his Glen Erin Pharmacy in the last 18 months, Sommerfeldt has installed a wire mesh glass front door, a sophisticated alarm system with strobe lights, and started storing most drugs in a vault.

His actions are in response to a growing problem in Ontario.

The executive director of the Ontario Pharmacy Association, Romeo Franceschini, says "there is no question that pharmacy break-ins have increased."

Franceschini points to a survey done by the OPA which showed 35.5 per cent of the 547 responding pharmacists reported crimes in their stores over a period of 12 months in 1978. In a 1979 survey, 50.9 per cent of 542 pharmacists reported crimes in their stores.

"We don't know why but there's a considerable increase in pharmacy crime," said Franceschini, "but we know security has been stepped up. One Toronto pharmacy owner has put a dog in his store."

Sommerfeldt says there is an element of risk in being a pharmacist. His assistant worked in a pharmacy where a man walked into the store in broad daylight, hit her over the head, took some drugs and attempted to escape.

Sommerfeldt cited another case in which the owner of a pharmacy which had many break-ins wanted to fight back. He placed two large drug bottles of colored water in full view of the customers and waited. The bottles were stolen and the pharmacist laughed to himself until he

was paid a visit by the thief. A man leaned over the counter one Sunday afternoon and said, "You know the trick you pulled on us with that colored water. Don't do that again or you'll regret it." The man turned and left, leaving a stunned and shaking pharmacist.

"It's pretty scary," said Sommerfeldt. "We take quite a risk. I have always been worried that when a judge turns a thief loose, he may not look for drugs, he may come looking for me."

The OPA's comments that it has no expectations as to why the pharmacy break-ins are increasing, are little comfort to Sommerfeldt who is angry at being the "ham in the sandwich" for desperate people stealing drugs.

"I don't understand it," said the frustrated Sommerfeldt. "We service three nursing homes where people don't want to take drugs but have to. Then you look on television talk shows and people in the public eye are glorifying the use of drugs. Young, impressionable people take this example."

Sommerfeldt first heard of people taking drugs to achieve euphoria after the last war. A pain killer called meprobate was mixed with alcohol and drunk.

The popular drugs are now dihydrocodeinone, novahystex and percodan which are all cough suppressants.

Sommerfeldt pointed another accusing finger at television advertising for drugs. The commercials in which a garage mechanic recommends aspirin for a headache is "sheer stupidity," he said. "No one comes to ask the pharmacist and the doctor what they need any more. They listen to television."



MORRIS LAMONT/THE TIMES

Sommerfeldt has been robbed 6 times in 18 months

Doctors' offices are targets, too

Locking up drugs will stop amateurs but not the professional thieves, says Dr. Dale Greene.

The plastic surgeon's office was one of three doctors' offices broken into this June at the Fitness Centre on Cliff Road.

"It's a misconception on the part of robbers that doctors stock up a lot of drugs," said Dr. Greene. "In the old days, when there weren't enough pharmacies close by, the doctors would dispense. Nowadays, doctors issue prescriptions."

How long a doctor can store a drug in the office is controlled by its shelf life. Injectable narcotics are effective for a month if refrigerated.

The security of keeping drugs is left up to the physician's interpretation of section 55 F of the Narcotic Control Act, which states the doctor is obliged to "take adequate steps to protect the narcotics in his possession against theft or loss."

Another area of concern among doctors is the frequent break-ins of their cars.

"Fewer doctors are buying MD license plates because they feel it is an invitation to be robbed," said Dr.

Andrew Sarne, chief of family practice at the Mississauga Hospital. Dr. Sarne has had his car broken into twice. "Most doctors are very cautious about their medical bags because we all carry pain killers," he said. "The bags are usually locked in the trunk."

After having her convertible's roof slashed twice in one year, Dr. Joan Charboneau gave up the convertible but refused to discontinue using MD license plates. In the event of a roadside accident, she is waved on the scene immediately by the police if they see the identifying plates.

Charboneau is not only concerned about the security of drugs but the disposing of the narcotics.

"I really discourage drug companies from leaving samples in my office and I have a real problem of getting rid of them safely," said Dr. Charboneau. "At the end of the year, I have a cupboard full and I can't put them in the garbage on the street because kids may get into them so I flush them down the toilet."

— PERKINS



THE TIMES

Dr. Charboneau

Drug addicts hit the hospitals

Nobody warned Dr. Joan Charboneau when she started her practice in Mississauga seven years ago that she would be a regular target for drug dealers and abusers.

Dr. Charboneau admits to being leery after incidents such as the one which occurred recently at the emergency ward in the Mississauga Hospital.

A man stumbled into the hospital exhibiting all the symptoms of a heart attack. Dr. Charboneau admitted him to the intensive care unit and prescribed regular injections of morphine. When the unsuspecting doctor told the man "unsavory tests" would be conducted, he became so upset he had to be physically restrained. It was later discovered the man had faked his heart attack symptoms and was suffering from drug withdrawal.

"The emergency department is a more difficult area to spot a scam," says Dr. Charboneau, "because a doctor is overworked and overrun. Our suspicions are down. I've watched some pretty convincing performances."

Dr. Andrew Sarne, chief of emergency physicians, who has

worked in the emergency ward for 10 years at the Mississauga Hospital says younger doctors "tend to be too gullible" but after they get taken once, they are more cautious.

The Ontario Medical Association acknowledges the difficulty of detecting a drug hoax in a busy emergency ward, and drafted a policy in 1978 outlining several precautions doctors can take. But Dr. Charboneau says it hasn't solved the problem.

"It happens when each doctor has a practice of 1,400 patients and you're on call for eight practices at once," says Dr. Charboneau. "That means you're covering for about 10,000 people."

Mississauga is a bad area for drug scams because its quick population growth leads to "revolving door practices," where few doctors get to know their patients well, Dr. Charboneau says.

After dealing with such "come-ons," Dr. Charboneau says, she has been able to discourage scams with her own precautionary measures, such as suggesting people come to the office to be examined instead of giving out phone prescriptions.

Christian school eyes Orchard Heights

By JOHN STEWART
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The board of deacons of the Queensway Cathedral in Etobicoke will make an offer to the city of Mississauga to buy part of the Orchard Heights Public School site.

The board decided at a meeting last week to ask Mississauga to purchase the entire five acres of land up for sale by the Peel Board of Education, which closed the school in June.

The church is offering to pay \$160,000 for the 1.6 acres of land it wants to buy, which includes the 18,000-square-foot school. It has also offered to pay more for the school building.

The school has approached the city because it wants to use Orchard Heights as soon as possible. The city has already offered to buy 3.4 acres of the property for parkland. If the school board was to sell the remaining 1.6 acres by public tender, as re-

quired by Ministry of Education regulations, there would be a considerable delay in occupying the building.

Ken Powell, church administrator for Queensway Cathedral, says the Queensway school is in a difficult position. "If city council doesn't buy the five acres, we really can't sit back and wait for a public tender," he says. The school has accepted only 325 students for the fall because of the uncertainty of its location.

The Queensway school may rent four classrooms in Sherway Drive Public School if it can't obtain the site by September. About two-thirds of the school's students are from Mississauga. The inter-denominational school has students belonging to 16 different religions. It has already agreed to allow the community to use Orchard Heights for a meeting centre if it purchases the school.

The Queensway School is not the

only private school interested in the site. Powell says the Peel board has apparently received at least one other offer to purchase.

City council is to discuss Aug. 13 the possibility of purchasing the entire school site.

The Peel Board of Education is to discuss Aug. 26 whether or not it will tender for sale of all or part of the Orchard Heights property.