

## **The pharmacy and the laundromat – a story of life with MCS**



**The story of how a series of mishaps turned an ordinary pickup of a prescription at a pharmacy into a complicated and tense situation.**

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I live in a rural area. At the time of this story (2011) the nearest town had just one pharmacy, with the next one 20 miles (30 km) further away.

It was a small pharmacy, which in the front had some tables where they displayed a lot of scented candles, scented potpourri and other gift items. The smell of these things was overpowering. Furthermore, the store just had some major renovations done, including painting the walls.

They did not have a drive-through pickup window.

## *2Pharmacy and laundromat*

I had not been inside this toxic place for several years. But a friend was too sick to go pick up a prescription herself, so I went.

I went at a time of day when they had few customers, to minimize the time I had to be inside.

Before going in I put on a heavy-duty respirator with dual filter cartridges. I tightened the straps to get as close a fit as possible.

Normally the respirator handles toxic fumes so well I can't smell anything when going into a store, but this one was so toxic I could smell it right through the filters.

It took just a few minutes to pick up the prescription, then I was out in the clean air again. My clothes were now so stinky I had to remove some of them before the drive home. I felt sick for the rest of the day and evening, but recovered by the next morning. That's life with severe MCS.

But all was not well. When I gave the prescription bottle to my friend the next day, she immediately noticed it had only half the expected number of pills. Looking closer, the pills were not the right ones, and the label on the bottle had some other person's name on it. They had given me the wrong bottle.

Another friend relayed that she too had recently been given an incorrect prescription at the same pharmacy. She discovered it just outside the door and got it corrected immediately.

I had to drive back into town to get it fixed.

When I got there, the wind came from the south-east, directly from a laundromat next door. And people there were using dryer sheets, which created a very toxic plume of fabric softener right to the door of the pharmacy.

I parked nearly a hundred feet (30 meters) from the door, where it was not downwind from the laundromat. The air was fine there.

I did not want to go inside that super-toxic store again, so I sat and waited.

When I saw a customer arrive by car, I walked over there with my respirator on. I briefly explained the situation and she promised to get an employee to come out.

A young assistant came out. I was wearing my respirator, and she had trouble hearing me through it, so I asked her to follow me over to the car, where the air was still clean.

It was bright daylight, the parking lot was empty, we were visible from all directions. We were only a hundred feet (30 meters) from the store. But she did not look pleased.

I explained why I could not go inside the store, and why I needed to wear the respirator when standing downwind from the laundromat. Then I gave her the mixed-up prescription bottle. The pharmacy had made a serious mistake, but I didn't castigate her for it. That is not my style and her face already seemed uncomfortable.

She took the bottle and walked back to the store. The sun was hot, so I waited in my car. The breeze was steady, so the dryer-sheet plume was steady as well. Invisible, but deadly.

Five minutes later, she came back out. She looked at me from the door, then walked over across the empty parking lot.

She looked visibly upset. I thanked her for coming out again, as is proper when people do something extra to accommodate a disability.

She was very upset. She said they made no mistake, such a mistake was impossible and illegal. It was simply inconceivable that they had mixed up the prescription.

I tried to calmly engage her in a discussion of how this may have happened, but I was simply met with anger.

There was nothing special about either of the two drugs, neither were a controlled substance, such as an opioid. But she was very defensive.

She also told me that "the pharmacist" had told her that "we do not serve people outside."

Again I explained my disability and what happened when I went into their store, but she just repeated "we do not serve people outside."

I had to drive home without the correct prescription. My friend then somehow got the issue resolved over the phone. We then drove back into town and were given

the correct prescription bottle by a different employee. At least the wind had shifted, so there was no longer the toxic plume from the laundromat.

### **The aftermath**

This happened more than ten years ago. I never set foot there again, and the pharmacy no longer exists. There are now three new pharmacies in the area, all three have drive-through pick-up windows, and none of them have scented candles or other toxic goods on display.

I wrote a detailed letter of complaint to the owner of the pharmacy. I still have a copy, which along with some notes made it possible to write this detailed account.

The owner called me and issued a lukewarm apology. He did not offer any sort of compensation for the trouble, including having to drive to town twice extra (each a 44-mile round trip). He said the young woman did not feel safe serving me away from the door and that she is a person who “permanently looks angry.”

I briefly considered filing a formal complaint to the licensing board, but that’s a bad thing to do in a small town, and nothing would have come of it anyway.

This story illustrates how having severe MCS can complicate things when ordinary things go awry. The combination of a toxic store and an unusual direction of the wind that day, together with a major screwup by the pharmacy. And then apparently an employee who seemed rather unstable.

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