



**MUSEUM OF THE ROYAL PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY
66-68 East Smithfield, London E1W 1AW**

Pointers to the handling of drug collections

The word *drug* in this exercise will not refer to the addictive substances of renown, but to animal, vegetable and mineral substances used as herbs, spices or medicines. These drugs appear in many forms, both solid and liquid.

My object is to give a few pointers to the handling of these substances. Handling procedures may be similar when collecting items from pharmacies, drug stores or even grocers and hardware stores.

- 1) **Fluted or ribbed bottles** - may contain poisonous substances or medicaments for external use only - treat with caution, especially if unlabelled.
- 2) **Unlabelled containers** - be very careful. Poisons are normally stored in distinctive packages, but it is not necessarily so.
- 3) **Do not sniff the contents of a bottle - especially if it is unlabelled.** If you cannot resist, breathe in away from the substance then gently sniff the cork or stopper starting at a distance away from the nose
- 4) **Do not sniff powders** - they may contain arsenic or snuff - or something to aggravate that allergy
- 5) **Syrupy substances** - many pharmaceutical preparations contain sugar which may spill and cause the bottle to stick to a shelf. Gently try to move a bottle, otherwise you may bring down a shelf.
- 6) **Corks** - are normally a good sealant but may become brittle and dry with time and may stick or, alternatively shrink and become loose. Do not use force to try to remove or, it will break.
- 7) **Glass stoppers** - may be hard to remove. If necessary, there are various methods of removal but do not use force.
- 8) **Paper bags** - many drugs come in paper bags. Be careful how you pick them up - they may have holes due to damp or pest attack. Do not take unwanted pests back to your collection where they will happily multiply.
- 9) **Avoid spillage** - when transporting a collection of drugs place containers of liquids in polythene bags to protect other items from spillage or breakage.
- 10) **Do not empty unwanted substances down the toilet or the sink** - contact your local pharmacist, who will advise you on disposal.
- 11) **Wear protective clothing** - when handling an in-situ collection from, for example, a pharmacy or drug-store. Wear gloves, face mask and suitable clothing (overalls and stout shoes).

- 12) **Do not touch eyes or mouth** – after handling drugs.
- 13) **Wash you hands and scrub you nails** – especially if you forgot to wear gloves
- 14) **Do not work in confined areas** – open windows or take frequent 'air-breaks'. Organic solvents and other chemicals may emit toxic fumes.
- 15) **If are pregnant** – Do not handle **any** drugs or chemicals

Remember,

If worried by physical contact with a substance, seek medical advice immediately. If possible, note the name of the substance to aid treatment.

If you are in possession of any dubious substances, ask a pharmacist for advice on disposal.

If you are offered a collection which contains drugs, consult a pharmacist or, better still, take one with you.