

A Look at Community Pharmacy Practice in Egypt



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Key takeaways:

- The Egyptian Drug Authority is the primary regulatory body in the country, responsible for the regulation of clinical trials, approval of medications, and licensing of pharmacies, distributors, and manufacturers.
- Health insurance has undergone major reform in Egypt. Universal health insurance was passed in 2018 and will be implemented over the course of the next decade or so.
- Pharmacy degrees are not standardized in Egypt, but all pharmacists must graduate from an accredited school and register before they are allowed to practice.



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Community pharmacies are those that dispense medications to patients who aren't hospitalized or in nursing facilities. This series explores how community pharmacy practice differs around the world. In doing so, it gives us the opportunity to view our own system in a new light and potentially find opportunities for improvement.

So far, we've explored the practice of pharmacy in [Japan](#), [Finland](#), [Australia](#), [Switzerland](#), [England](#), the [United Arab Emirates](#), [Iran](#), [Malawi](#), [Argentina](#), and [Portugal](#). In this post, we'll look at community pharmacy practice in Egypt.

To help us better understand pharmacy practice in the country, we interviewed [Nahla Wakkad](#), a pharmacist who graduated from [Tanta University](#), located in the Egyptian city of [Tanta](#), and currently lives and works in the capitol, Cairo.

How Egypt's pharmacy system works

[Egypt](#) is a country in North Africa that is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea, to the north, and the [Red Sea](#), to the east. It is famous around the globe as a cradle of civilization, and every year thousands of tourists flock to the country to view its national treasures, like the [Great Pyramid of Giza](#) and the [Valley of the Kings](#).

It has a strongly centralized healthcare system, with the federal government controlling the majority of healthcare regulation in the country.

Health insurance

Healthcare insurance in Egypt is provided through a mixture of public and private funders and consists of the following systems:

- **Universal health insurance:** In 2018, the country passed the Universal Health Insurance law, which aims to provide universal coverage to all Egyptians once it is fully implemented (over a period of 12 to 15 years). Universal health insurance is funded through the Ministry of Finance.
- **Parastatal organizations:** These include the Curative Care Organization and the General Organization for Teaching Hospitals and Institutes. These organizations are at least partially funded and overseen by the Ministry of Health and Population, but they have separate budgets and operate independently of the universal health insurance system. These organizations can also contract with private companies to provide services on their behalf.
- **Private insurance:** A small percentage of Egyptians have private insurance. In fact, private insurance accounts for only about 3% of total healthcare financing. Allianz and AXA are two major private insurers in the country.

Outcomes

In 2019 — the most recent year data is available on — Egypt's annual healthcare spending was about \$150 per person, or 4.7% of GDP. By comparison, in 2020, the U.S.'s healthcare spending was \$12,530 per person, or 19.7% of GDP, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Egypt's under-5 mortality rate, a key indicator of health-system performance, was 19.5 per 1,000 live births in 2020. That is far higher than in the U.S., which was 6.3 per 1,000 live births the same year. However, Egypt has been consistently reducing its under-5 mortality rate for quite some time.

In 2020, life expectancy at birth — also sometimes used to evaluate health-system performance — in Egypt was [72 years](#). That is somewhat lower than in the U.S., where it was [77 years](#) in 2020.

Notably, as of 2018, 95% of Egypt's population lives [within 5 kilometers](#) of a healthcare facility, making care accessible to the vast majority of residents. However, out-of-pocket costs are very high in Egypt, accounting for over [62% of total healthcare spending](#) as of 2019. In the U.S., by comparison, out-of-pocket costs make up around [11% of total healthcare spending](#).

Pharmacy regulation

The [Egyptian Drug Authority](#) is [responsible](#) for medication approvals, price regulation, and helping to oversee [clinical trials](#). The organization is also responsible for licensing manufacturers, distributors, and pharmacies.

The [Egyptian Authority for Unified Drug Procurement](#) is responsible for purchasing medications used in government healthcare facilities.

[Medication pricing](#), which is regulated, is set when a product is approved for use. Prior to 2009, pricing was based on a cost-plus model, meaning the price of a medication was determined by the cost of production plus an additional fixed percentage, or markup. [Decree 373](#) was then introduced in 2009, which instituted a reference pricing system based on the medication prices of 36 other countries.

Further reforms took place in 2012, when [Decree 499](#) left the reference pricing system intact but changed the profit structure between manufacturers, distributors, and pharmacies.

Egypt produces the [vast majority](#) of its medications domestically, and efforts have been made to further expand production capabilities. The government, for example, has supported the establishment of [GYPTO Pharma](#), also known as "medicine city," one of the largest medication manufacturing facilities in the Middle East.

While there are both [over-the-counter](#) and [prescription-only](#) medication categories, the country is currently struggling with [enforcing the laws](#) that regulate the sale of prescription medications. As a result, some pharmacies are able to illegally sell regulated medications without a prescription.

Daily pharmacy practice in Egypt

According to Mrs. Wakkad, pharmacies in Egypt are usually freestanding facilities, meaning they're not located in other businesses, like grocery stores. Pharmacies sell cosmetics, but not snacks or drinks. There are, however, many chain pharmacies, such as [Delmar and Attalla](#).

She also notes that pharmacy claims submitted to the universal healthcare system must be done by paper. With private insurance, however, claims can be submitted electronically.

In the past, to [become a pharmacist](#) in Egypt, candidates could earn a variety of degrees — Bachelor of Pharmacy, Master of Pharmacy, and Doctor of Pharmacy — or a postgraduate diploma. Recently, however, the country has moved toward making a [Doctor of Pharmacy](#) degree the industry standard.

The Doctor of Pharmacy curriculum consists of courses in the basic sciences, such as biochemistry, anatomy, and physiology, in the early years. As students progress, they take courses in pharmacokinetics, pharmacotherapy, community pharmacy, law, and other pharmacy courses necessary for practice.

Educational institutions are regulated by the [Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research](#) and must be accredited. To obtain a license to practice in the country, graduates must register with the Ministry of Health and the [Egyptian Pharmacists Syndicate](#).

The bottom line

Egypt has an evolving healthcare system that is expected to provide universal coverage once recently passed legislation is fully implemented. Outcomes linked to health-system performance still lag behind those of some developed nations, but the vast majority of Egyptians are able to access care. Regulation is strongly centralized, with a few federal organizations overseeing licensing, medication approvals and pricing, pharmacy education, clinical trials, and healthcare financing.

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