

## Poor penmanship a cause of drug errors

Medical doctors are notorious for bad handwriting. Reading some prescription orders has been likened to deciphering hieroglyphics or interpreting the Rosetta Stone.

Yet, although society once made light of their indiscernible scratches and scrawls, doctors' bad handwriting is no longer a laughing matter. According to Paul B. Hackmeyer, M.D., chief of the medical staff at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, poor handwriting can be dangerous -- if not deadly.

"Bad handwriting can lead to dramatic medication errors," explained Dr. Hackmeyer.

Hackmeyer cited a widely publicized 1999 case in Texas where a jury awarded a woman \$450,000 because her husband died from taking the wrong medication.

"Because of the doctor's poor penmanship, the pharmacist mistakenly gave him a different medication," he noted. "This tragic situation is certainly a cautionary tale for everyone in the medical profession."

**SOURCE:** "Handwriting Challenged Take Penmanship Class," Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, April 27, 2000.