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## 5 deaths probed in pharmacy case

### Store owner must resign as manager

By Luma Muhtadie  
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The coroner is now investigating the deaths of five people who filled their prescriptions at King West Pharmacy.

"At this point we've done one autopsy," Dr. David Eden said. "We've gathered records, physical evidence and conducted interviews in all cases ... they're all under active investigation and that investigation will continue."

Following the launch of the RCMP investigation, the Ontario College of Pharmacists said it wanted the pharmacy ordered closed. It later modified the application, asking yesterday that the store be operated under strict conditions.

Superior Court Judge Allan Whitten ordered seven conditions in a Hamilton courtroom yesterday.

The coroner's investigation has grown in the past couple of days, as three more deaths came to light.

RCMP investigators last week raided the pharmacy and seized a large quantity of tablets, including three different versions of the drug Norvasc, used to treat high blood pressure and angina.

One was a knock-off containing no active ingredients and thought to be made of pressed talc; the second was Norvasc made by Pfizer for sale in Turkey and not approved for use in Canada; the third was an approved version of Norvasc made by Pfizer for the



Gary Yokoyama, the Hamilton Spectator

Staff at King West Pharmacy deal with members of the media, parked in front of the store.



Kaz Novak, the Hamilton Spectator

A locksmith changes the lock on the pharmacy.

Canadian market.

King West owner and pharmacist Abadir Nasr is to immediately resign as manager, and have no further involvement with the store's operations. He is also facing a disciplinary hearing by the Ontario College of Pharmacists.

All other pharmacists or managers at King West must be approved by the college, which means Bhashmang Mehta, who is also suspected by the RCMP and facing college discipline, is forbidden from working at the store.

"This not only protects the public, but it also allows all the patients from King West Pharmacy to have continuing care," said Della Croteau, deputy registrar with the college. "There are a number of patients relying on King West Pharmacy for their medications and so this solution allows that to happen."

The pharmacy, on King Street West near Locke Street, had its neon 'open' sign turned off at 2:30 p.m. yesterday, as representatives of the court-appointed receiver, Deloitte & Touche Inc., paid a visit. A locksmith arrived shortly after to change the locks on the door.

CIT Financial Ltd of Burlington, which gave Nasr a \$1.1-million advance to buy the store, also appeared in court.

Company lawyer William Dunlop said the agreement CIT signed with Nasr allows them to appoint a receiver to protect their investment.

"The investigation by the RCMP and the seizure of drugs triggers these provisions," Dunlop said.

Cameron Godden, a health discipline and malpractice lawyer representing Nasr, did not oppose the application put forth by the college and CIT.

"We are as anxious as the college and the receiver to get to the bottom of the issues and that's why we are taking this position today," Godden said.

Mehta did not have a lawyer in court yesterday.

The RCMP investigation was sparked when a customer refilled her Norvasc prescription at King West Pharmacy and noticed the pills had a different shape than she was used to. She told a member of her church, a Port Dover pharmacist, who in turn alerted Pfizer.

RCMP investigators have interviewed numerous tenants at a nearby retirement home, many of whom are longtime patrons of King West.

One woman, who asked not to be named, was interviewed by police after they learned she filled her prescription for Norvasc at King West. "People are upset and rightly so," she said.

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