

Advice giving in community pharmacies on presentation of NHS prescriptions

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Introduction Recent years have witnessed increasing interest in developing the role of community pharmacies as a key primary health care resource. In part, this is driven by the need to reduce the burden of demand on over-stretched GP-led services. Emphases on self-care and public use of community pharmacies for the management of common or minor ailments are closely associated with reducing the demand for GP consultations.¹⁻⁴

Evaluating levels of advice given by pharmacists is key to developing the contribution made by the pharmacy profession to this wider primary care role. The data presented here have been gathered as part of the baseline data for the evaluation of the electronic transmission of prescriptions and its impact upon pharmacy practice and patient services.

This paper aims to identify the level of advice giving on presentation of NHS prescriptions in community pharmacies and factors that may influence its variability.

Method Non-participant observational studies of the presentation and collection of prescriptions were undertaken in 30 community pharmacies in England between September 2001 and January 2002. The pharmacies were purposively selected for their diversity in terms of average dispensing load, pharmacy type, location, prescription collection and delivery services and self-reported relationships between pharmacists and local GPs.

Data were collected about the level of advice-giving for prescription medicines and whether this was initiated by a member of pharmacy staff or the customer. No attempt was made to distinguish between those customers exempt or liable for prescription charges, or between the different conditions about which pharmacy customers sought or received advice.

Results In total, 747 customers were observed presenting NHS prescriptions; advice was received by less than one fifth of this number (133, 17.8 per cent). Thirty of these customers (22.6 per cent) requested advice and the remaining 103 (77.4 per cent) were offered advice by pharmacy staff.

Comparing the frequency of

FOCAL POINTS

- * Advice is given to almost one fifth of pharmacy customers presenting National Health Service prescriptions
- * Pharmacy staff offer advice more frequently than patients request advice
- * There is substantial variation in levels of advice giving between individual pharmacies
- * Patients using prescription collection services are less likely to receive advice compared with those customers presenting their own prescription

advice-giving between individual pharmacies reveals substantial variation. The proportion of customers presenting NHS prescriptions and receiving advice ranged from 0 to 66.7 per cent. In six of the pharmacies involved in the study (20 per cent), no advice was given while the observations were being undertaken.

Preliminary analyses reveal that customers using prescription collection services are less likely to receive advice (10.7 per cent) compared with those customers presenting prescriptions in store (20.2 per cent). The high level of collection of prescription medicines by patient representatives may have contributed to this trend.

Pharmacy type also appears to have some effect on the frequency of advice giving. More than a quarter of customers presenting prescriptions in pharmacies that were part of a small chain received health care advice (27.3 per cent) compared with only 7.7 per cent of those visiting a super-market pharmacy.

The advice most frequently given by pharmacy staff or requested by pharmacy customers concerned the taking of medication (61 per cent).

Discussion Interpreting the frequency of advice giving in the context of the 552 million prescription items dispensed in England in the year 2000 suggests that community pharmacies are a significant resource in terms of advice about medicines. Indeed, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's Code of Ethics expects pharmacists to give advice when dispensing medicines.

That 17.8 per cent of customers presenting NHS prescriptions receive advice is a substantial figure considering the majority of patients with pre-

scriptions are experienced users. However, there is considerable variation between levels of advice giving in different community pharmacies. This may be, at least in part, attributable to pharmacy type, location or the availability of prescription collection services.

The frequency of advice giving to customers presenting NHS prescriptions does not accurately reflect the total frequency with which advice is given in community pharmacies; community pharmacists have a well established role advising on minor ailments and the choice of OTC medicines.¹⁻³

References

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