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A qualitative analysis of an intervention designed to enhance over-the-counter consultations

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Abstract

Background: Self-medication with over-the-counter (OTC) medicines plays an important role in global health systems. OTC medicines have various benefits, nevertheless it is important to consider their risks. Pharmacists are charged to ensure a safe and appropriate use of prescription-only and OTC medicines. However, research showed a non-compliant behaviour of pharmacists to their professional standards and guidelines. This is based on a lack of information exchanged between pharmacist and consumer. In order to enhance OTC consultations it is pivotal to overcome identified barriers to OTC consultations.

Aim: To analyse a component of an intervention designed to enhance OTC consultations, regarding its impact and feasibility in the community pharmacy setting based on pharmacy staff's opinions.

Methods: A feasibility study with an intervention including situational cues was conducted in two pharmacies in suburban Perth. This intervention addressed barriers to OTC consultations such as consumers do not understand the role of the pharmacist, consumers cannot distinguish between pharmacists and pharmacy assistants and consumers underestimate the risk of self-diagnosis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted after the intervention with pharmacy staff to capture their perception of the impact and feasibility. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed with qualitative methodology.

Results: Of 19 pharmacy staff participating in the study, 12 semi-structured interviews with pharmacists and pharmacy assistants were analysed. The main impact during the intervention was the situational cue badges with a big font to identify pharmacy staff as pharmacist or pharmacy assistant. Pharmacy staff reported consumers took notice of the situational cue badges and could distinguish between their positions.

The participating staff did not report any major problems during the research process. Minor problems, such as a heavy recording device, incomplete induction of staff to the research process and the size of the situational cues posters were reported.

Conclusion: Pharmacy staff reported an impact of the intervention during the feasibility study. The situational cue badges may helped to distinguish between pharmacy staff. The research process was feasible in a community pharmacy setting based on pharmacy staff's opinions. Since an impact was seen and the research process was feasible, this intervention showed promise in enhancing communication in OTC consultations. Further research is needed to underpin this conclusion.