

PATIENT COUNSELLING: NEED OF HOUR AND EMERGING TREND

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ABSTRACT

The goals of therapy will not be achieved unless patient understands and follows the instructions for the use of prescribed drugs. The efforts and expenses are wasted if patient fails to take recommended treatment. The pharmacist is the logical health professional to presume major responsibility in minimizing noncompliance. Priority importance is the need to strengthen communication within patient, physician and pharmacist. Counselling is part of clinical pharmacy practice to give maximum benefits to patient. Counselling involves giving advice and making certain that advice understood by patient. Pharmacist is the person who dispense actual drug to patient and of great help in improving compliance. Patient counselling is providing medication information to the patients on directions of use, side effects, precautions, storage, diet and life style modifications. Pharmacist can also ask and understand difficulties of patient and consequently counsel them. With the aid of various techniques of communication as verbal, written or audio-visual pharmacist can inform, educate and counsel patient. The article highlights current scenario, objective, need and guidelines to patient counselling, pharmacist role and barriers to work as health care professional. Counselling ensures patient compliance can reduce non-compliance and satisfies today's need ensuring patient safety.

KEYWORDS: Patient counselling, compliance, Pharmacist role.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, the pharmacy profession had gone through various stages to conquer one of the relevant positions in the Health care system throughout the world. Earlier, pharmacy professionals called compounders were focused on the preparation, compounding, storage and dispensing of medicines. Presently the situation has changed in a way that pharmacy profession has moved from behind the counter to explore their excellence in the field of pharmaceutical care. Currently medical practitioners rely more heavily on medications than in the past. For these medications to work to their full potential, patients need to take them correctly. Pharmacists are the final health professional's contact for most patient receiving prescription medication. The pharmaceutical care implies all the pharmacy activities aimed at promoting right use of medicines by patient in the right manner.^[1] From the definition itself it is well understood that the pharmacist has a great role in improving patient medication adherence. Patient counselling is one of the most important tools for better pharmaceutical care. Knowledgeable patient's exhibit increased compliance with drug regimens, resulting in improved therapeutic outcomes. Patient counselling is defined as providing medication information orally or in

written form to the patient or their representative on direction of use, advice on side effects, precaution, storage, diet and life style modification.^[2] It should be interactive in nature. The information is usually given verbally, may be supplemented with written materials. Good communication skills are needed to gain the patients' confidence and motivate the patient to adhere to the recommended regimen.^[3]

Need of Patient Counselling in Indian Scenario^[4,5]

- A high level illiteracy, poverty and lack of awareness among patients.
- Lack of adequate drug information due to limited availability of literature, poor documentation and poor funding.
- Patient non compliance towards the prescribed treatment⁹.
- The Widespread sale of prescription drugs over the counter.

Objectives of Patient Counselling^[6,7]

- Changing health behaviors and improving health status of public.
- To recognize the importance of medication for his well being.

- To Establish continuous interaction and consultation with patient.
- To Improve Patient's understanding about medication, its side effects and drug interactions.
- To make Patient an informed, efficient and active participant in disease treatment and self care management
- Motivate patient to medication adherence/compliance.

Contents of patient counselling^[3,8]

OBRA 90 is the acronym of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act. It was enacted in USA on 5th November 1990. Under OBRA 90 pharmacists educate patients or their care giver on at least the following issues.

- i. Name and description of the medication
- ii. Dose, dosage form and route of administration.
- iii. Special precautions for the preparation, administration or use of medication by the patient
- iv. Common severe side effects, adverse effects, interactions and contraindications that may be encountered.
- v. Technique for self monitoring therapy.
- vi. Proper storage of the medication.
- vii. Prescription re-fills information.
- viii. Any action that should be taken in the event of a missed dose.

Techniques of counselling^[2,3,9]

Several techniques can be adopted for effective counselling. Some of them include providing written information to the patient and the use of audiovisual materials. The use of various compliance aids include labeling, medication calendars, drug reminder chart and providing special medication containers and caps can also be adopted.

The United States Pharmacopoeia (USP) medication counselling behaviour guidelines divide medication counselling into the following four stages:

Stage I: Medication information transfer, during which there is a monologue by the pharmacist providing basic, brief information about the safe and proper use of medicine.

Stage II: Medication information exchange, during which the pharmacist answers questions and provides detailed information adapted to the patients' situation.

Stage III: Medication education, during which the pharmacist provides comprehensive information regarding the proper use of medicines in a collaborative, interactive learning experience.

Stage IV: Medication counseling, during which the pharmacist and patient have a detailed discussion intending to give the patient guidance that enhances problem-solving skills and assists with proper

management of medical conditions and effective use of medication.

Who and When to counsel^[10]

The amount and type of information provided to the patient will vary based on the patient's needs, and practice setting. Ideally, the pharmacist counsels patients on all new and refill prescriptions. If the pharmacist cannot counsel to this extent, it should be defined which patient types, or which medications pharmacists will routinely counsel patients. This will vary depending on the pharmacy clientele and may include

- Confused patients, and their care givers
- Patients receiving more than a specified number of medications
- Patients known to have visual, hearing or literacy problems
- Patients on anticoagulants
- New patients, or those receiving a medication for the first time (transfer prescription)
- Children, and parents receiving medication
- Patients receiving medication with special storage requirements, complicated directions, significant side effects

Pharmacists should counsel on all new prescriptions, including transferred prescriptions. Counselling on transferred medications may seem to be unnecessary given that the patient has already been taking the medication; however, it provides the pharmacist an opportunity to interact, and establish a relationship with the patient.

Counselling on non-prescription drugs^[2]

Effective non-prescription drug counselling requires a thorough description of patient's symptoms. Before advice can be given, the intern will need knowledge on the nature, severity and extenuating circumstances surrounding those symptoms. If pharmacist recommend a non-prescription drug product, he should discuss:

- Directions for use;
- Expected outcomes of therapy, including a time-frame for a response;
- Common adverse effects and precautions;
- Correct storage; and,
- When to seek medical attention.

Ideally, pharmacist should document non-prescription drug use on the client's medication profile. This is especially important for clients who have a medical condition and/or are taking prescription medication.

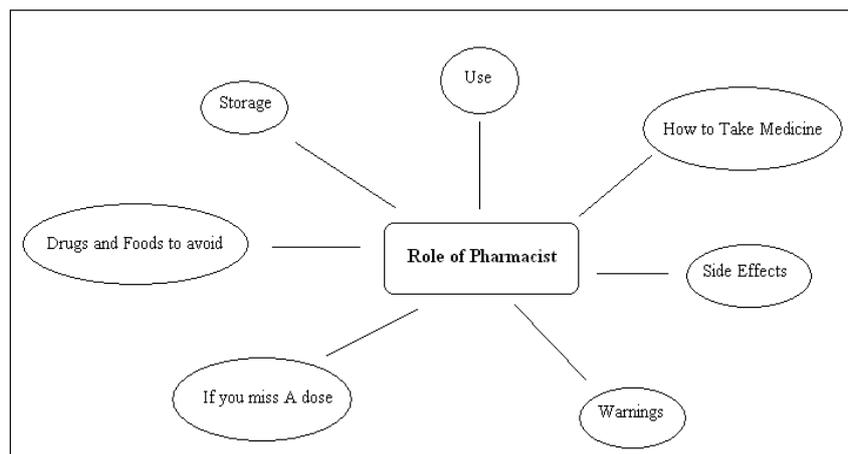
Counselling area

The patient should be counselled in a semi-private, or private, area away from other people and distractions, depending on the medications. The patient should perceive the counselling area as confidential, secure and conducive to learning. This helps ensure both parties are focused on the discussion, and minimizes interruptions

and distractions. It provides an opportunity for patients to ask questions they may be hesitant to ask in public.

Documentation

The counselling session should be documented. This may be as simple as a check list or as detailed as recorded notes in the patients' medication profile. Any follow-up required should be noted. It should also be recorded if the patient does not wish to be counselled.



Role of Pharmacist in patient counselling^[11]

- Act as a learned intermediary between a prescriber and a patient.
- To improve quality of life by providing quality health care to Society.
- An integrated member of the health care team directly involved in patient care.
- Play an important role to avoid prescription errors
- Acts as Communicator, collaborator and health promoter.

Barriers to work as Health Care Professional^[4]

1) Patient Based Barriers

Patient may not like to listen. He/ she may have some disadvantage/ may not know your language/ may feel shy or inhibited. These barriers must be overcome with patience. However if the patient is reluctant about accepting advice, it is better to leave him and not insist on giving advice.

2) System Based Barriers

The owners of the establishment may not like patient counselling or there may not be enough space where counselling may be done.

3) Provider Based Barriers

The pharmacist who is giving the counselling may have problem with language or subject or some other problem may be there. All these barriers must be overcome to be able to give proper patient counselling.

Advocating Importance of patient counselling^[12]

As the current PCI President Dr.Suresh said, the country has the largest qualified pharmacist's pool compared to the other developing countries like Africa and South Asia. The government will be able to reduce the disease burden if their services are well utilised. Therefore the need of the hour is to sensitize the indispensable role of pharmacists in the healthcare space, he added. The awareness of need of patient counselling should convey through community pharmacist is good. So rules for running the community pharmacy should modify.

Patients may not see the importance of discussing how and when to take their medication with the pharmacist. Therefore, it is essential that the pharmacist promotes the importance of patient counselling. This can be done through various means:

- **Promotion** - A poster can be put up in the pharmacy and or a pamphlet/card can be given to patients coming to the pharmacy, or the information can be incorporated in regular newsletter that a pharmacy provides patient counselling.
- **Health Screening** – The pharmacy can offer health screening facilities which promote patient counselling. For example, a pharmacy offering free blood pressure checks for its consumers specifically brings them to the pharmacist, with enough time and scope to initiate conversation during the act of measuring blood pressure. In this way, confidence in the pharmacist about their professionalism and approachability can be generated.
- **Computer generated leaflet** – Many pharmacies have installed a leaflet system that provide patient with computerised general information about medication they have prescribed, dosage regimen, and the disease.
- **Medication adherence system** – In India many pharmacies started putting stickers on dispensed medicine by which patient can easily identify medicines each time when they take. USP pictograms were made as stickers with information in local language. These stickers show “Take medicine in morning”, “Take medicines in the night before sleep” and other. These help people to take multiple medicines.

- **Twenty-four hours information** - Pharmacies in some countries have started providing twenty-four hour information service through a phone line where qualified and trained pharmacist answer questions with access to computer databases and drug resource.
- **Making the time** – Most patients feel that the pharmacists are always busy at the counter either attending to other, or dispensing. This perception will only change when the pharmacists clearly demonstrate that they have time for patients.

CONCLUSION

The concept of patient counselling is getting popularised in India during the last ten years. Considering changing health behaviors and improving health status there is need to evolve strategies for effective patient counseling. In Indian set up nobody will do the things if there is no act to implement regulations to provide compulsory patient counseling and pharmaceutical care by qualified personnel. So, legal assistance is very much important by enacting a law by the parliament. Patient counseling is one of the effective ways to get into the heart of public the profession “pharmacist”. Educational efforts that integrate individual counseling, group classes, audiovisual aids, written materials, and community resources are more likely to be effective than those employing a single technique. Hence patient counselling is need of hour.

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