

## Importance of patients counselling

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### ABSTRACT

#### Patient Counseling

'Patient counselling' by pharmacists is a diverse and ill-defined activity. It is also an activity which is achieving more prominence as part of the 'extended role' which is seen as the way forward for the profession. Patient counseling is a key competency element of the Pharmaceutical Care process. Given the advertising for medication in the media and easy access to information on the Web, it is important for pharmacists to provide appropriate, understandable and relevant information to patients about their medication. The pharmacist is in a highly visible and readily available position to answer patient concerns and enquiries about their medications and alternate treatments they may read about or hear from others.

Counseling is a way of relating and responding to another person so that he/she is helped to explore his thoughts, feelings and behavior to reach a clear self-understanding. Also, the person is helped to find and use his/her strengths to be able to cope more effectively with making appropriate decisions, or taking appropriate action. It is an integrative process between a client, who is vulnerable and who needs assistance, and a counsellor who is trained and educated to give this assistance. The goal of the interaction is to help the client learn to deal more effectively with him/herself and the reality of his environment.

**Patient counseling** is not an activity which can in itself generate some revenue. This activity is being proposed as an additional service to be rendered by a clinical pharmacist so as to enhance the success levels of healthcare. At present this activity may be taken up by pharmacy trained professionals who are working in medical shops or hospitals. They can do it only after taking the necessary training and after attaining the necessary knowledge.

Patient counseling, as the name implies, is simply advising the patient. It consists of a pharmacist advising a patient on how medicines are to be taken and how side effects, if they appear, are to be managed. Most important part of the entire exercise is that the pharmacist gives unbiased and authentic information in a most professional manner, with warmth and understanding.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Definition

Patient counseling is defined as supplying medication information orally or in writing to the

patients or to their representatives, on the use of drugs, their side effects, and precautions in storage, diet requirements and life style modifications [1-5].

## Objectives of patient counseling

- Patient compliance must increase.
- Patient must understand the need for the medication.
- Patient must get a confidence in the pharmacist's knowledge and reliability. If and when a need arises, patient must come back to the pharmacist.
- Patient must understand the strategies to deal with any side effects.
- Patient becomes an active participant in the treatment.
- Pharmacist must be seen as a professional.
- Adverse drug reactions and drug interactions must be prevented.

## Stages in the patient counseling process

There are three **stages in the patient counseling process**; introduction, process (content, manner) and conclusion.

### Introduction

- ▶ The pharmacist introduces himself and finds the name, age and medication information of the patient.
- ▶ The pharmacist explains the purpose of counseling and obtains information from the patient regarding any allergies, use of herbal medicines and any concerns the patient may have and patients understanding of the need for the therapy.

### Process

The counselling process uses verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

- ▶ Verbal communication skills are:- -Language - Tone -Volume -Speed
- ▶ Non-verbal communication skills are:- - Proximity -Facial expression

Counselling is a two-way communication process and interaction between the patient and the pharmacist is essential for counselling to be effective.

The counselling content is considered to be the heart of the counselling session. During this step the pharmacist explains to the patient about his or her medications and treatment regimen .Lifestyle changes such as diet or exercise may also be discussed. Topics commonly covered include:  
Content & manner:

## Content

- The drug's generic name and brand name
- How the medicine helps the patient?
- How the medicine will make the patient feel?
- How long it takes to begin working?
- How much should be taken at one time?
- How often to take the medicine?
- For how long to take the medicine?
- When to take the medicine? How to take it?
- What to do if a dose is forgotten?
- Foods or fruits or drinks or other drugs to be avoided while taking this medicine?
- Restrictions on activities?
- Most possible side effects? How to deal with side effects?
- When to report problems?
- How long to wait before reporting no change?
- Storage
- Expiration date
- Cost
- Refilling when necessary
- Necessity to complete the course
- Possible drug-drug or drug-food interactions
- Need for medication reminder chart

## Manner

- Use of appropriate language which the patient understands
- Use of counseling aids, like charts and brochures
- Facts should be told in simple language in logical order

## Conclusion

- ▶ Verify patient's understanding by feedback
- ▶ Emphasize key points
- ▶ Allow the patient to come forward with any concerns
- ▶ Help the patient to plan an action plan for follow up.

Well, friends, when you look at the long lists under each sub heading, it looks rather frightening. But in reality it is not necessary that in each case we tell every point. The pharmacist has to deal with each situation as it appears, and to each patient he/she must tell the most necessary points. If a patient knows most of the points, as is the case with patients having chronic diseases, there is no need to repeat all the points. It is enough if we highlight the important

points. In our coming blogs, we will develop the theoretical as well as the practical side of patient counseling much more and we will supply many more details.

### **Need of Patient counseling**

The information on using drugs is technical and needs to be understood by the patients before using it. The patients are unaware regarding precautions and tips to prevent harmful effects of the drugs and at the same time good outcomes due to medicines. This can only happen by a personalized professional counseling in the matters of drug, disease and life style. It is also important to make and respond to the instructions in the prescription, so that he/she understands and behaves responsibly like an informed patient.

The patient requires practical information after he gets the prescription medicines at pharmacy. The out patients and ambulatory patients are likely to develop confusion regarding usage of medicines after reaching home. In an eventuality he is likely to face dilemmas regarding whether the drug should be taken before or after food, regarding the time gap between the doses, any special precautions like drowsiness etc., the likely change in body condition and food-drug interactions etc.,

### **Basic skills required in patient counseling**

When the patient arises at the counter of pharmacy for collecting the dispensed medications. The first encounter should be impressive and emphatic. The pharmacist at the counter should present him/her self that the patient feel encouraged and confident. The pharmacists while dispensing should estimate the patient needs by friendly gestures and inviting him/her to ask questions while answering questions the patients need to verify the correctness of information given to the patients. If the patients requires elaborate discussion should be invited to come to patient counseling room where in patients privacy is ensured. The pharmacists should not ask too many questions which embarrass the patient. The pharmacist should listen patiently, the problems and difficulties of patients. In case of any strange things in prescriptions comes to notice of pharmacist, he should not criticize or comment on prescription or prescriber. He should directly contact the doctor and draw his/her attention to the flaw in the prescription and correct without knowledge of the patients.

### **Advantages of patient counseling over written instructions**

The dialogue mode of patient counseling is a direct personalized one to one discussion. In this model patient can reveal his/her difficulties due to disease and medications. Patients get motivated by direct interaction by a pharmacist. The written instructions are passive and difficult to understand by mere reading.

### **The etiquettes and manners required for successful patient counseling**

When the patient arrives at the pharmacy the pharmacist should present himself as professional distinct from assistant or pharmacy aid. The patients' needs are to be gauged and an offer voluntary help should make patient comfortable and at ease. The patient should never get the feeling of getting neglected or ignored due to rush more of customers. The due diligence should be imbibed should never express unhappiness due to excess work pressure. This is important as the patient himself under the spell of disease is under stress and should not get depressed due to negative expressions of gestures of pharmacist.

### **The impact of patient counseling on pharmaceutical care**

Patient counseling is the gateway for pharmaceutical care and practice. The personal dialogue and listening patiently to the greenness of the patients is the first step towards insuring the patient's confidence and acceptance as a reliable professional. Further the pharmaceutical care can be built on the rapport built by patient counseling.

### **The advantages and limitations of providing free patient counseling**

The advantages of free patient counseling are making the expenditure of medicine for a patient and third party co-payers. The limitations are the patient counseling may not be done properly and it is not possible to demand accountability for no patient counseling and substandard counseling. The money spent on medicines can be realized if the medicines deliver the expected outcomes and does not cause harm to the patients. Hence it is very important to give proper instructions and guidelines for using the prescribed medicines.

### **Accountability of patient counseling services**

The documentation of services can be done using CCTV which can be used as data for reinforcement of services in case they render services fall short of expected standards. Further the TV footages of CC camera are possible if the patient counseling is carried out. The performance of the pharmacist can be assessed on cumulative scale and periodic review. This type of scheme makes the pharmacist alert and understands the skill areas in which the pharmacist need to improve for delivering quality services for the patients.

### **The importance of confidentiality in patient counseling**

The patients are sensitive to their privacy of health and are likely to hide their health condition to the public as there are multiple influences on opportunities and impression regarding the personality of patient. The patient has approached the pharmacist with a confidence that his disease condition shall not be revealed to other people in the community. The disclosure of patient information in the public is unprofessional and unethical

### **Difference between patient education and patient counseling**

The patient education is set of instructions and classified information explained to the patient with a hope of that a patient understands vital information for a particular disease of the patient. Patient education is an impersonal communication addressed to presumed needs of a drug therapy. Whereas the patient counseling is an active model of appeal to the patients instructing regarding the disease and drugs used by them with an intention of motivation.

### **Bottlenecks hindering the patients to voluntaries to avail patient counseling**

The psychological and social inhibitions of the patient's discourage them to open up and disclose their personal information of health. However the service of the pharmacist mainly depends upon patient's history which can be obtained with skillful interview and interactions. Once the patient feels confident and opens-up then the patient disclosed the information. Based on the disclosed information pharmacist can plan a personalized patient counseling plan.

## **COUNSELLING TECHNIQUES**

These techniques help assure good communication with young people during the counselling session

- ▶ Create a positive and friendly first impression.
- ▶ Establish rapport during the first session, show empathy and reassure the young client.
- ▶ Eliminate barriers to good communication (e.g., negative attitudes, poor listening, not allowing youth to express fears or ask questions, being judgmental and impatient, etc.)
- ▶ Use “active listening” with the young client; i.e. acknowledging, confirming and asking clarification from the speaker.
- ▶ Provide information simply and use visual aids as much as possible.
- ▶ Ask appropriate and effective questions and use open-ended questions.
- ▶ Allow youth to ask questions and seek clarification.
- ▶ Recognize and take advantage of teachable moments.

### **Guidelines on Counseling**

#### **What to counsel**

The following is excerpted from the Standards of Practice document:

- ▶ Pharmacist must develop, implement and fulfill plans to monitor the patient's progress towards desired therapeutic outcomes
- ▶ Routinely and accurately identify the amount and type of education desired / required by patients to maximize their chances of solving or preventing their drug related problems.
- ▶ Routinely and accurately identify the degree of monitoring required by a patient according to the health risks posed by the patient's medication, drug related problems, or disease.
- ▶ Routinely, effectively and, in consideration of the above two statements, appropriately educate patients on the following when dispensing prescription and non-prescription drugs, when patient
  - ▶ Counseling on discharge medications or when providing recommendations about management of specific drug related problems:
    - Name and class of the drug (e.g. antibiotic, pain reliever)
    - Directions for use including education about drug devices

- Special storage requirements
- Common or important drug-drug or drug-food interactions the reason for the drug and the intended therapeutic response and associated time frames. (It is recognized that pharmacists do not always have access to the therapeutic indication for the drug).
- Common or important side effects and associated time frames
- What the patient should do to monitor his/her therapeutic response or development of side effects actions the patient should take if the intended therapeutic response is not obtained or side effects develop
- When appropriate, the actions the pharmacist will undertake to monitor the patient's progress

### **Who and When to counsel**

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

- Patients receiving more than a specified number of medications
- Patients known to have visual, hearing or literacy problems
- Paediatric patients
- Patients on anticoagulants

### **Patients who should always be counseled**

- Confused patients, and their caregivers
- Patients who are sight or hearing impaired
- Patients with poor literacy
- Patients whose profile shows a change in medications or dosing
- 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

### **Patients who should be counseled at certain intervals**

- Asthmatic patients

- Diabetic patients
- Patients taking 4 or more prescribed medications
- Patients who are mentally ill
- Patients using appliances
- Epileptic patients
- Patients with skin complaints
- Patients misusing drugs
- Patients who are terminally ill

### **Format of counseling provided**

Counseling should be verbal, and accompanied by written material for the patient to refer to at home. Patients are often stressed and upset from their illness while waiting for their prescription and may not be able to focus on what the pharmacist is discussing with them.

Written material reinforces what the pharmacist says and helps the patient recall what was said. If the patient has forgotten or is unsure of what the pharmacist said, the written material may provide the answer, or stimulate the patient to call the pharmacist. This provides the pharmacist an opportunity to reinforce key points about the medication and assess how the patient is doing. The written material may provide basic information only, or be quite detailed. Pictograms, such as those used for illustrating how to administer eye drops, are much easier to understand and should supplement a detailed verbal description.

### **Counseling area**

The patient should be counseled in a semi-private, or private, area away from other people and distractions, depending on the medication(s). The patient should perceive the counseling 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 counseling 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 counseled.

## Counseling on non-prescription drugs

Effective non-prescription drug counselling requires a thorough description of patient's symptoms. Before advice can be given, the postgraduate student will need knowledge on the nature, severity and extenuating circumstances surrounding those symptoms. As well, other aspects of the patient's health e.g. other diseases, drugs, contraindications, allergies, must be examined. This information-gathering" stage is most important.

When non-prescription drugs are indicated, the postgraduate student must be able to give information to the patient so products are used both safely and effectively. When providing care to patients involving over the counter medications, it is necessary to perform an adequate mini-assessment of the client's problem, consisting of:

- Properly identifying the person who will be using the product and determining their approximate age;
- Inquiring about any current medical conditions;
- Asking about current non-prescription drug use, including herbal products;
- Asking about current prescription drug use;
- Inquiring about the symptoms and duration of the complaint;
- Asking about whether the client has any medication allergies; and,
- Asking whether the client has consulted a health care professional about the problem.

### You should refer the client for medical attention if

- Their condition is potentially severe,
- They are uncertain about their symptoms,
- Their self-diagnosis is likely incorrect,
- The condition has not responded to previous appropriate therapy, or
- They have other risk factors that should be assessed.

When you have assessed the client and the problem, and feel that a referral is not necessary, you may recommend an appropriate product or course of action, including non-drug measures. If you recommend a non-prescription drug product, you 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 nonprescription 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.

### Medication counseling tips

- ▶ Establish relationship – show interest in patient (verbal & nonverbal)
- ▶ Verify patient's name and prescriber's name
- ▶ Why the patient is being prescribed the medication (if known) or the medication's use, expected benefits and action
- ▶ Open the medication containers and show patient what the medication looks like, or demonstrate use
- ▶ How to take the medication
- ▶ When to take and how long to take the medication
- ▶ What to do if a dose is missed
- ▶ Any special precautions to follow
- ▶ Foods, alcoholic beverages or OTC's to be avoided
- ▶ How the patient will know the medication is working
- ▶ How to store the medication
- ▶ If the prescription can be refilled, and if so, when verify the patients' knowledge and understanding
- ▶ Ask the patient if they have any questions
- ▶ Document the interaction

## CONCLUSION

The counseling process properly implemented and consistently maintained. The pharmacist gets recognized and his/her involvement in the drug information gets sharpened due to involvement and reference. The pharmacist drives a professional satisfaction and in the sense of fulfilment due to acknowledgement of gratitude by the patients. It has been proved that the patient counseling improves quality of outcomes Like;

- Improved patient understanding of their medication, resulting in increased compliance
- Reinforcement of advice from primary health care team

- Those patients most in need given more attention
- Improved job satisfaction for pharmacists
- Improved patient loyalty
- Improved pharmacist-prescriber relationships
- Ability to demonstrate quality of service provided when requested by outside agencies

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