Engaging students in patient studies? an experience from randomised controlled trial on Medicines Use Review benefits in Slovenia

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Background Running patient studies requires numerous resources, one being motivated and skilled workforce to collect quality data. Senior pharmacy students could be engaged for this purpose.

Purpose To describe experiences with students? involvement in a RCT on Medicines Use Review (MUR) benefits in Slovenia from students and study coordinator perspective.

Method A RCT consisting of two visits to compare MUR to standard care in Slovenia was performed. Senior pharmacy students were trained to perform interviews and collect data. After each visit we set up an online survey with open-ended questions to evaluate their experiences with involvement in the study. Furthermore, students rated their overall experience with involvement in a RCT regarding the pharmacy, patients and study coordination on a 5-point scale (1=very poor, 5=very good). Additionally, study coordinator perspective on the matter was provided.

Findings The response rate was 100% (18 female students) and 70.6% (12/17 female students) for the first and second round, respectively. On average (SD) students performed 7.4±5.8 and 6.8±3.58 interviews for visit 1 and visit 2 respectively. Students reported positive experiences with participation in the study and found it useful to practice their communication skills and pharmacotherapy knowledge. They evaluated communication and cooperation with pharmacists and study coordinator as adequate and training for the study as comprehensive. Some issues with gaining required documentation from the pharmacy were reported and more adaptability with interview dates was wished for. Students felt accepted by the patients and therefore found it hard to distinguish between the role of a research interviewer and future role as pharmacist. They also reported patients had difficulties with understanding all study requirements. Overall experience with involvement in the study was marked 4.3 and 4.9 (pharmacy); 4.4 and 4.5 (patients) and 4.9 and 4.9 (study coordination) for visit 1 and visit 2, respectively. 88% (visit 1) and 75% (visit 2) of respondents would participate in such a study again. Involving students in a RCT provided study coordinators with competent workforce for affordable financial input. Students were motivated and well-informed on the research topic. The research was an opportunity to advance their skills and gain experience which will be recognized by future employers.

Conclusion Involving students in this type of research work was a positive experience. It represents a win-win situation for all parties and it should be considered for future patient studies.