

Design and evaluation of a fine-tuned counseling approach by community pharmacists tailored to patients' needs of over-the-counter medications

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Background Our pilot study showed only one third of consumers understood how to take over-the-counter (OTC) medications correctly based on the information provided on OTC packages. It is imperative to fine-tune current counseling approaches by community pharmacists tailored to patients' needs of OTC medications.

Purpose This study aims to design, implement, and evaluate impacts of a tailored counseling approach on consumers' awareness of the correct use of OTC medications.

Method This cross-sectional study has been conducted in 2 phases using pre-post study design with a face-to-face survey at a single community pharmacy in Taiwan. Participants included are consumers who are at least 20 years old, understand Mandarin, and attempt to purchase an OTC medication at the study site. One hundred participants will be recruited in both phases. In phase 1, participants are given usual counseling of the medication use of the OTC they purchased. In phase 2, participants are provided with a fine-tuned pharmacist counseling approach along with the instruction of medication use from the OTC packaging. A 15-minute questionnaire assessing participants' understanding of correct use of the OTC medication they purchased is administered and evaluated by a senior pharmacist as participants completed consent process.

Findings The fine-tuned counseling approach has been established. It consisted of five steps which facilitated a structured pharmacist-consumer interaction regarding the safe use of OTC medications. These principles (SAIDS) included (1) Surface the past medication history, (2) inquire Allergy, (3) provide medication Indication for consumers, (4) Direct how to take medication correctly, and (5) Strategies of coping with common Side effects and Self-care. The evaluation questionnaire has been created and confirmed with face validity by experts working in pharmaceutical care research and practice. This on-going two-stage survey, for participants receiving either a regular counseling or a fine-tuned counseling, is estimated to be completed in January 2019. The reliability will be assessed by Cronbach's alpha. By then, we should be able to understand whether consumers receiving a fine-tuned pharmacist counseling, in comparison with regular counseling, have better understanding of correct use of the OTC medications.

Conclusion The fine-tuned counseling approach may help refining pharmacists' OTC medication counseling skills toward a more structured and effective way and, thereby, empowering consumers' awareness of their ailments and self-medication in the scenario of often time-limited encounters with each other.