

Exploring the feasibility and acceptance of mystery visits followed by personalized feedback as educational intervention for community pharmacists

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Background A blended learning program for community pharmacists with regard to preconception, pregnancy and lactation was shown to be insufficient to implement high-quality counselling of women in Belgian pharmacies (Ceulemans et al, RSAP 2020). Academia and organizations involved in continuous education (CE) and professional development of community pharmacists are therefore looking for more effective strategies. Mystery visits, followed by personalized feedback to pharmacy staff, might be a potential strategy.

Purpose To explore the feasibility and acceptance of personalized feedback provided during online sessions shortly after mystery shopping visits.

Method A feasibility study consisting of two mystery shopping visits followed by online feedback sessions (± 30 minutes) with community pharmacists was performed in Belgium between October-December 2020. All pharmacists ($n = \pm 800$) who followed an accredited CE course on preconception, pregnancy and lactation in 2019-2020 could register their pharmacy for study participation. The feedback sessions were open to all pharmacy staff members, were moderated by two academic pharmacists (VF and MC) and the mystery shoppers, and were organized via Skype for Business 1-2 weeks after the visits. The mystery shoppers were female pharmacy students who were trained by the researchers and who requested a pregnancy test. Pharmacy staff did not receive the transcripts of the pharmacy conversations prior to the first round of feedback sessions. The feedback conversations were qualitatively assessed.

Findings Initially, 15 community pharmacies showed interest to participate, of which ultimately only 10 geographically distributed pharmacies participated ($n = 41$ pharmacists). The feedback sessions after the first round of mystery visits were organized at lunch time or after the closure of the pharmacy and were attended by 26 pharmacists (63%). Eight of the 10 pharmacists who counseled the mystery shoppers attended the online meeting (80%). Pharmacists were open for feedback, listened carefully and interacted professionally and extensively during the sessions. Pharmacists generally expressed their appreciation for this more personal training format and showed their willingness to sharing the findings within their team and to applying the feedback into practice.

Conclusion Although sometimes confronting, the feedback sessions were well perceived by this very small but highly motivated group of pharmacists. The time-consuming nature of this individualized teaching approach should be emphasized, as well as the fear for mystery visits among pharmacists. In the future, the effectiveness of personalized feedback on the quality of counselling should be assessed, as well as how the acceptance of mystery visits among pharmacists can be improved.