

On mastering over-the-counter medications: A structured counseling approach for educating pharmacy experiential students while empowering lay consumers

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Background Quality pharmaceutical care would be ensured through nurturing competent pharmacists and improving patients' knowledge of drug use. We engaged pharmacy students in applying a structured approach of over-the-counter (OTC) medication counseling to facilitate consumers' understanding of appropriate drug use while on the Advanced Community Pharmacy Practice Experiences (ACPPEs) rotation. The structured counseling approach (SAIDS) has been developed and included (1) Surfacing Symptoms and medication history, (2) inquiring Allergy, (3) providing medication Indication, (4) Directing correct medication use, and (5) Supporting Self-care.

Purpose By engaging senior pharmacy students in exercising the SAIDS counseling approach, the study aims to investigate possible impacts on students' professional growth and customers' understanding of the correct use of OTCs.

Method Each six-week ACPPEs rotation was evenly divided as control (conventional consultation) and experimental (SAIDS consultation) stages. In this cross-sectional study, consumer participants were recruited at three community pharmacies in Taiwan from March to May 2020. Convenient sampling was used, and eligible participants were at least 20 years of age, understood Mandarin, and purchased an OTC. A 12-item paper-and-pencil self-administered questionnaire was used to assess participants' understanding of the correct use of OTCs. Pre- and post-ACPPEs questionnaires, 5-item and 7-item respectively, were employed to evaluate students' professional growth. Descriptive analysis and chi-square test were used for analyses.

Findings Five pharmacy students partook in the study and reported gaining more confidence in providing OTC consultation services. Thirty-nine customer participants received conventional counseling while sixty individuals got SAIDS counseling services. No significant differences were found in demographic backgrounds of the participants receiving either counseling approaches. On average, the participants were 48 years of age. The majority of the participants were female, and more than 75% of them had a college degree or higher. Most participants (60%) always read instruction labels before purchasing or using OTCs. The information that participants mostly read included indications, dosage and administration, drug names, and cautions. In either group, the majority (72-87%) of the participants understood the indications of the acquired OTCs; however, less than half of the participants were fully aware of the correct administration. While consumers who received the SAIDS medication counseling showed a significant understanding of how to use OTCs correctly ($p = 0.016$). No matter what type of counseling that consumers were provided, less than one-third of the participants were able to identify the cautions that they needed to pay attention to the OTCs they purchased.

Conclusion Students' professional growth in OTC consultation proficiency was reported, although more learners' feedback is still awaited. Pharmacy students impact consumers' awareness of how to use OTCs correctly via facilitating consumers' understanding of the OTC label information. The structured medication counseling approach may help foster communication skills of OTC counseling of pharmacy students to engage the conversation between consumers and healthcare professionals regarding the use of OTCs.