

Enhancing Patient Counselling in Community Pharmacy Setting: Strategies, Challenges, and Best Practices Points: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Patient counselling is their fore an interaction between care provider and patient during which the patient is provided with information about the health condition, medications etc. Patient counselling as a component of pharmaceutical care delivery can provide the launching pad for increased recognition of the role of pharmacist as care giver. Patient counselling is a vital component of community pharmacy practice, influencing medication adherence, health outcomes, and patient satisfaction. However, pharmacists face numerous challenges in providing effective counselling. This presentation aims to explore strategies, challenges, and best practices for enhancing patient counselling in community pharmacy settings, ultimately improving patient care and health outcomes. A comprehensive review of literature and expert opinions identified key strategies, challenges, and best practices for patient counselling. These include effective communication skills, patient- centered care, medication therapy management, technology integration, and inter-professional collaboration. Enhancing patient counselling in community pharmacy settings requires a multifaceted approach. By adopting effective strategies, addressing challenges, and implementing best practices, pharmacists can improve patient outcomes, satisfaction, and adherence to medication regimens.

KEYWORDS: Patient counselling, Community pharmacy, Medication adherence, Health outcome, effective strategies, Communication skill.

1. INTRODUCTION

Patient counselling is a crucial aspect of healthcare that involves the communication between a healthcare provider and a patient or their caregiver. The goal of patient counselling is to provide patients with the necessary information and education about their medical conditions, treatments, and medications, and to empower them to take an active role in their healthcare. Patient counselling is essential in ensuring that patients understand their medical conditions, the available treatment options, and the potential risks and benefits of these treatments.¹

As we approach the Counter we have to observe the patient's non-verbal cues for any barriers that need to be overcome while communicating with the patient. There comes various barriers faced by a pharmacist in a clinical setting to perform his counselling service.² Some barriers are patient-centered such as counseling the caregiver instead of the patient, low level of education and physical condition of the patient which is difficult

to overcome. Whereas some are institution-centered like delay of discharge order, lack of privacy etc. which can be counteracted by strict implementation of policies. To provide a framework for ensuring medication adherence and the optimum therapeutic efficacy it is mandatory to counteract the barriers faced by a pharmacist in communication with the patient. The difference in having a positive or negative pharmacotherapeutic outcome purely depends on an effective pharmacist consultation. Although individual pharmacist has their own way of counseling a client, they must follow certain key features like introducing themselves, identifying the right patient using patient details, providing comfort ensuring Privacy to the patient and also solving their queries.³

2. BENEFITS OF PATIENT COUNSELLING

Improved Medication Adherence: Patient counselling helps patients understand their medications, dosages, and potential side effects, leading to better adherence.

Enhanced Health Outcomes: Counselling enables patients to manage their conditions effectively, reducing symptoms and improving quality of life.

Increased Patient Satisfaction: Patients feel more empowered and confident in managing their health, leading to increased satisfaction.

Better Disease Management: Counselling helps patients understand their conditions, prevention strategies, and lifestyle modifications.

Reduced Hospitalization Rates: Effective counselling reduces hospitalization rates by promoting preventive care.

Improved Quality of Life: Counselling addresses patients emotional and psychological needs, enhancing overall well-being.

Increased Patient Empowerment: Patients become more informed and involved in their healthcare decisions.^{4,5}

3. PATIENT-PHARMACIST COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

Communication barriers in healthcare can have negative consequences for patients' health outcomes. Several studies have identified communication barriers that pharmacists face when communicating with patients. Language barriers, cultural differences, and low health literacy levels among patients are common challenges faced by pharmacists when communicating with patients. Additionally, some patients may have communication difficulties such as hearing impairment or speech disabilities that can pose a challenge for pharmacists during counselling sessions. Language barriers are particularly prevalent in multicultural societies, such as Malaysia, where patients may not speak the same language as their healthcare providers.⁶

Revealed that cultural and language differences unfavourably influence the communication between patients and public health professionals. Health literacy is another challenge, as patients may not have the necessary skills to understand medical information and instructions. Cultural differences can also pose a challenge, as patients may have different beliefs, values, and attitudes towards healthcare that may impact their adherence to medication regimens. The other challenge is the lack of training and education in communication skills. Many pharmacists do not receive formal training in communication which can impact their ability to communicate effectively with patients. Likewise, the lack of patient involvement in medication decision-making can also pose a challenge. Moreover, pharmacists often have limited time to spend with patients due to high workload and time pressure, which can result in incomplete counselling

or inadequate communication.⁷

4. PATIENT-PHARMACIST COMMUNICATION APPROACHES

Pharmacists use various communication approaches to overcome the challenges they face when communicating with patients. For instance, using visual aids, such as pictures or videos, can be helpful in overcoming language barriers and low health literacy levels among patients. In addition, pharmacists can use patient-centred communication techniques, such as motivational interviewing and open-ended questions, to facilitate patient engagement and improve medication adherence. One of the most common approaches used by pharmacists in communicating with patients is the use of plain language. This is the use of simple and clear language that is easy for patients to understand. Studies have shown that the use of plain language improves patient understanding and adherence to medication regimens. Pharmacists also use active listening and empathy to establish rapport with patients and understand their concerns and needs. Active listening involves giving patients full attention, asking open-ended questions, and repeating back what they have said to ensure understanding.

5. BARRIER TO EFFECTIVE PATIENT COUNSELLING

Patient counselling and education helps in achieving objectives of disease management and promoting the rational use of medicines. It can lead to successful therapeutic outcome that improve patient's quality of life. In general, limited health literacy is associated with medication non-adherence and medication errors that in turn lead to higher med expenses, longer or more frequent hospitalizations and poorer health. In this regard pharmacist puts lot of efforts through counselling and employing new medications available for use in the community setting

In order to accomplish the goal of best drug therapy possible, pharmacist makes various attempts to built strong relationship with patients through effective communication However, at many instances pharmacist fails to achieve this therapeutic goal mainly as a result of insufficient medication adherence by the patient. In addition, there are many barriers to patient counselling those can be broadly classified into barriers to counselling and barriers of continued counselling. Furthermore, barrier to patient counselling may also be classified as:

5.1 Patient-Related Barriers

- 5.1.1. Language barriers
- 5.1.2. Low health literacy
- 5.1.3. Cultural differences
- 5.1.4. Emotional or psychological issues
- 5.1.5. Lack of motivation
- 5.1.6. Limited cognitive ability
- 5.1.7. Sensory impairments (hearing, vision)
- 5.1.8. Social or economic factors

5.2 Healthcare Provider-Related Barriers

- 5.2.1. Limited time for counselling
- 5.2.2. Lack of training or expertise
- 5.2.3. Insufficient knowledge of patient's condition

- 5.2.4 Communication style (e.g., authoritarian)
- 5.2.5. Biases or stereotypes
- 5.2.6. Burnout or stress
- 5.2.7. Limited availability of resources

5.3 System-Related Barriers

- 5.3.1. Inadequate funding
- 5.3.2. Limited access to technology
- 5.3.3. Bureaucratic hurdles
- 5.3.4. High patient volume
- 5.3.5. Pressure to meet productivity targets
- 5.3.6. Lack of interdisciplinary collaboration
- 5.3.7. Inefficient documentation systems

5.4 Environmental Barriers

- 5.4.1. Noise or distractions
- 5.4.2. Lack of private consultation space
- 5.4.3. Limited availability of educational materials
- 5.4.4. Inadequate lighting or seating
- 5.4.5. Uncomfortable temperature^{8,9,10}

6. STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THE BARRIERS

Barriers to patient counselling can be overcome by employing appropriate strategies. In fact, to practice patient counselling effectively, it is essential to remove all the barriers that might be felt by the individual. Pharmacist should first identify the barriers and then offer to counsel a patient. Pharmacist should educate patients about why they need medication counselling. Let them know taking the initiative to understand their medication will help them achieve a better therapeutic outcome. Once done, pharmacist may move further to help patients understand all of the important features about their medications. Overcoming barriers to counselling requires a good awareness of wide range of strategies and be open to flexibility in adapting services to meet the needs of their patients. Various strategies used to overcome barriers in effective patient counselling .

6.1 Spare time: Pharmacists in community pharmacy should remember to make them available to the patients. This is because, allocating appropriate time for each patient is crucial for effective counselling. Each patient deserves and should have time with the pharmacist before they leave the Pharmacy, so that they understand why they are taking the medication and how it should be taken, which will increase medication adherence, Pharmacists should develop strong relationship by taking time to counsel each patient with attentiveness and empathy.

6.2 Knowledge adequacy: Pharmacist is often the patient's last opportunity for verbal and printed instructions on how to take medications properly. This role is particularly important, because patients with low health literacy often comprehend more when directions are explained verbally. Pharmacists achieve this goal by acquiring adequate and consistently updated knowledge about health problems and medications.

6.3 Develop confidence: Pharmacist can develop confidence by initially focusing on one particular

disease or group of drugs. They can learn to improve patients ability to take medications properly by educating them on how to communicate more effectively.

6.4 Improve communication: Pharmacist should improve his communication skills, especially language fluency and Visual prompts. Good communication skills help to attain patients health outcomes. Pharmacists should be able to observe and interpret the nonverbal messages such as eye contact, facial expressions, body language, vocal characteristics, etc., that patients give during counselling.

6.5 Eliminate language gap: Pharmacist must be prepared, ahead of time, to provide non-English speakers or English speaker with the best care possible. In fact pharmacist should have good command over language skills for effective communication. The language barrier can be eliminated by appointing a multilingual staff. Even translation service can be hired to provide interpreters over the phone so that pharmacist can call in and gets a 3-way call going.

6.6 Improving patient’s health literacy: Patient’s health literacy may severely impact the success of their health recovery. For illiterate or low-literacy patients, it’s essential that pharmacist should speak clearly and slowly in simple language and words that patient will understand. Pharmacist should explain medications twice and obtain compliance from care-taker by asking few questions about the information provided.

6.7 Provide sufficient staff: Patient education and counselling on medication use is an additional legal responsibility of pharmacist to the practice of dispensing. This additional responsibility impacts Pharmacy’s staffing pattern. The owner of Pharmacy needs to determine the number of patients a pharmacist can deal each day. There should be enough number of pharmacists dedicated for patient education and counselling each day.^{11,12,13}

Table No.1 STAGES OF PATIENT COUNSELLING

1.Introduction	Counselling develop upon the knowledge and skills of the counsellor. Pharmacist should know as much possible about the patient treatment details. In community pharmacy the source of information include patient and prescription or a record of previous dispensing.
2. Counselling content	Name and strength of medication. The reason why it has been prescribed, or how it work. How to take the medication. Expected duration of treatment. Expected benefit of treatment. Possible adverse effect. Possible medication or dietary interaction. Storage recommendation. Minimum duration required to show therapeutic benefit.
3. Counselling process	The pharmacist should introduce himself/herself to the patient and treat them by name.
	It is best to use title such as mr, mrs, miss. Eg- hello mr,any name, my name is x and I am your clinical pharmacist. I would like to tell about the medication.

	<p>Do you have a few minutes to spend with me. Pharmacist gather information from the patient disease, medication.</p>
<p>4. Closing the counselling session</p>	<p>Before closing the session, it is essential to check patient understanding. This can be achieved by feedback question, such as can you remember what is this medication is for? Or how long should you take this medication? Ask the patient about any doubt. Before final closure and if time permits ,summarise the main point in logical order</p>

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, patient counselling is an essential aspect of healthcare that plays a crucial role in improving patients' health outcomes and enhancing their adherence to treatment plans. Effective patient counselling requires effective communication skills, cultural competence, and a patient-centered approach that considers each patient's individual needs and preferences. By providing high-quality patient counselling, healthcare professionals can empower patients to take an active role in their care and improve their overall health and well-being. Enhancing patient counselling in community pharmacy settings requires a multifaceted approach. By adopting effective strategies, addressing challenges, and implementing best practices, pharmacists can improve patient outcomes, satisfaction, and adherence to medication regimens.

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