

**PILLS OF WISDOM:
AN INVESTIGATION OF PHARMACIST - PATIENT INTERACTIONS
IN A SOUTH AFRICAN ANTIRETROVIRAL CLINIC**

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“Every human interaction develops situationally, at a microscopic scale of social structure. Yet, it is always embedded in larger patterns – linguistic, social, cultural, historical – and draws meaning from these larger patterns.”

(Blommaert, Collins, & Slembrouck, 2005, p. 203)

“In a way, HIV/Aids is not a medical problem at all. Yes, people need the antiretrovirals, the facilities for treating the complications and opportunistic infections and the structures for the healing and care of the dying but the problem is almost entirely a social, political and economic one.”

(Ellis, 2004, p. 85)

“When you work in AIDS, you see the best and worst in the human species. You see the most awful rejection and prejudices and even killings and even denial and not wanting to deal with it, and you see also enormous dedication and heroism and activism and people not taking no for an answer.”

(Peter Piot, 2006, as cited in COSMOS, 2006)

ABSTRACT

Successful communication with patients in a multicultural, multilinguistic environment is a challenge to health professionals, particularly in the context of HIV/Aids and antiretroviral (ARV) treatment. Although the introduction of ARVs has brought hope, high levels of adherence are required to ensure treatment success and numerous barriers to adherence exist. Pharmacists play an important role in encouraging adherence to ARV treatment regimens by providing education and counselling. However, previous research indicates that interactions are often dominated by the pharmacist. Also, verification of patients' understanding of information is infrequent and that patients are often passive recipients of instructions. This study aims to identify and describe interactive processes in pharmacy interactions while considering the impact of the disease and macro context on communication.

Twenty-six cross-cultural, cross-linguistic pharmacist-patient interactions from a South African HIV/Aids pharmacy are described. Data collection included video recordings, interviews with participants and ethnographic observations in the pharmacy. A hybrid analytical approach incorporated aspects of Conversation Analysis (CA) and Discourse Analysis (DA).

The results of this study are particularly encouraging. They demonstrate that despite the presence of cultural, linguistic and other contextual barriers, pharmacist-patient interactions can be efficient. The use of facilitative verbal and non-verbal communication strategies ensures that dosage instructions are successfully communicated by the pharmacist to the patient. In line with prior research, collaboration is promoted when pharmacists create rapport and focus on the lifeworld of the patient. The study shows that intuition and sensitivity to atmosphere in interactions is essential for achieving concordance.

The disease context of HIV/Aids has a profound influence on the pharmacist-patient interaction and this study demonstrates the significant impact of the macro

context on micro aspects of communication. The evidence suggests that the nature of humanity and the daily interface between culture and language in South Africa enables pharmacists and patients to transcend some of the barriers to communication and collaboration that have been identified in previous studies. The findings imply that the diversity of South Africa provides both hope and a resource which can inform policy and future practice.

Keywords: pharmacist, patient, interaction, institutional talk, HIV/Aids, antiretroviral, South Africa, cross-cultural, Conversation Analysis, Discourse Analysis

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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