



How pharmacy teams can provide health education

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Educating the public and the role of the pharmacy team

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Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of healthcare, the role of the pharmacy team has never been more crucial in serving the needs of the public. As trusted and accessible healthcare professionals, pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and other pharmacy team members play a vital role in ensuring the safe and effective use of medications. Beyond simply dispensing prescriptions, they are at the forefront of patient education, providing valuable information on drug interactions, side effects, and proper medication management.

Educating the public on health impacts in reducing the sources of health illness and advancing the individual's health and wellbeing across;

- Protecting the community health- infectious disease control, environmental health hazards, and emergency response
- Refining individual's health- steps to improve health and wellbeing, minimising health inequalities
- Health services- guaranteeing that they are effective, efficient and accessible

These key areas of public health could be reinforced by; public health assessment, workforce development and promoting evidence through research.

Do personal opinions have a role in educating the public?

Human beliefs shape our perspectives and actions. It's important for pharmacists to critically evaluate beliefs, seek diverse perspectives, and engage in open-minded discussions [1]. Respectful dialogue, empathy, and understanding can bridge differences and foster a more inclusive society. Beliefs are found to be a key component of public attitudes, and this may have a part in deciding how individuals behave as customers. The method of advising the community certainly includes changing beliefs and, to a certain extent, persuasion.

Education strategies linked to welfare problems depend on the target individuals and their desired outcomes. These individuals not necessarily be homogeneous, but may have identifiable needs relevant to their welfare. Educating the public is likely to be effective to provide factual information to the community and is more likely to produce good outcomes. Health education activities could be done as lectures, courses, seminars, webinars, and workshops. Regardless of the format, most health education activities would share common attributes such as:

- Assess the community to identify the priorities, capacity, and resources.
- Bring target individuals to participate.
- Plan the activities that may increase target individuals' knowledge and skills.
- Implement programs that could take place in a convenient environment for target individuals.
- Present the information with attractive graphical and audio-visual effects.
- Ensure staff are trained to maintain consistency in the program.

This article delves into the significance of educating the public on health-related matters and highlights the indispensable role of the pharmacy team in empowering individuals to make informed decisions about their well-being.

Minor Ailments

The Minor Ailments Scheme (MAS) or Pharmacy First Service in the UK is an NHS initiative that allows pharmacists to provide advice and prescribe treatments for minor health conditions, aiming to reduce pressure on general practitioners, emergency departments and most importantly best use of the pharmacists' professional skills and expertise [2-6]. For the scheme to reach its full potential, pharmacists must actively educate the public about its benefits and appropriate utilisation [7-12].

Pharmacists are well-positioned to raise public awareness about the MAS as trusted healthcare professionals. Strategies to achieve this include

- displaying educational materials in pharmacies
- engaging in personalised discussions with patients
- collaborating with local healthcare providers
- participating in NHS public health campaigns
- utilizing social media and online platforms
- organising public workshops and talks
- working with schools and community groups

Emphasising clarity and simplicity in communication is vital to ensure patients understand the information effectively [7-12]. Additionally, continuous professional development (CPD) is essential for pharmacists to stay updated on the latest healthcare developments and confidently communicate about the scheme [7-12]. By actively educating the public about the MAS, pharmacists can enhance public awareness, promote appropriate use of the service, and contribute to more effective and accessible primary healthcare services. Moreover, active engagement of the public in MAS improves health outcomes and contributes to cost savings for the NHS by reducing unnecessary GP appointments and emergency department visits allowing resources to be allocated more efficiently.

Chronic diseases

Educating the public is crucial for healthcare providers, like pharmacists, in reducing chronic disease prevalence in the community [13]. Knowledge gaps and misconceptions about diseases among the public such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases have been observed [14]. Interventions to address these gaps include promoting health literacy of chronic diseases, enabling informed decision-making [15]. Pharmacist-led education workshops have shown effectiveness in improving public knowledge and attitudes toward diabetes prevention and management [16]. Virtual diabetes education programs have also been successful, providing essential information to at-risk individuals [17]. Pharmacists' hypertension-related health education programs have improved blood pressure control and disease knowledge [18]. Adequate health literacy was associated with reduced cardiovascular risk and better outcomes [19,20].

The critical features of interventions in educating the public on chronic diseases may include:

- Group-based programs with peer support are more effective, and individualized sessions can be arranged as needed, lasting 3 to 12 months [21].
- Technology-based solutions are being integrated into educational programs for delivery and follow-up [22].
- Behaviour-change initiatives may include motivational interviewing and mobile applications to facilitate habit formation [23].

In summary, pharmacist-facilitated community-based programs are effective in educating the public about chronic diseases. Following recommended design and delivery features is essential for successful outcomes. Improving health literacy and providing accurate information can significantly impact chronic disease prevention and management.

Mental health and well-being

The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the importance of managing mental health and wellbeing, with the World Health Organisation (WHO) calling for increased investment in mental health due to the pandemic's impact on social isolation, fear, loss of income, and employment [24,25]. Mental health conditions cost the UK significantly, but services remain underfunded, making it essential for health practitioners like pharmacists to play a role in educating the public and supporting individuals with mental health issues [26,27]. Research has shown positive impacts of pharmacists' involvement in mental health, such as improved prescribing practices and patient satisfaction [28]. However, studies have also highlighted the need for mental health training for pharmacists to enhance medication adherence and support [27]. Pharmacists in community settings are well-positioned to

- screen and identify individuals at risk of mental illness
- run promotion campaigns
- provide education to patients and their carers [27]
- offer services promoting good physical health, which can be associated with mental health medication use [29]

To fulfil this role effectively, pharmacists require appropriate training and support, including incorporating mental health training like Mental Health First Aid into pharmacy curriculums and CPD programs [30]. Many pharmacists also interact with individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts, necessitating crisis first-aid training and continuing support [31-36].

In summary, pharmacists can play a vital role in mental health care, provided they receive the necessary training and recognition, especially in light of the heightened importance of mental health in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Health literacy

Health literacy, defined by the WHO as the capacity to access, understand, appraise, and use health information to make informed decisions, is crucial for individuals and communities [37]. Limited health literacy is caused by issues such as low basic education, lack of appropriate population targeting, and challenges in accessing and utilizing modern communication technologies [38]. Many people may lack a critical level of health literacy [39]. Poor health literacy negatively impacts individuals' health outcomes and public health service use, leading to unhealthy behaviours and more complicated health conditions [40].

Pharmacists can play a significant role in improving public health literacy. To address the issue effectively, pharmacists should

- establish trust through effective communication
- educate patients using plain language
- utilise visual aids and digital health tools to enhance understanding

Pharmacists can also engage in health workshops, screenings, and educational sessions to raise awareness and improve health literacy within the community [41]. Collaboration with other healthcare providers and stakeholders is essential for successful public health literacy initiatives. Despite practical challenges, pharmacists' unique position allows them to play a crucial role in addressing health literacy, as it is a shared responsibility of the entire health profession and society. Proper training and recognition are vital to capitalise on this opportunity.

Antimicrobial resistance through antimicrobial stewardship

Pharmacists play a crucial role in combating antimicrobial resistance, a growing global health concern [42]. By implementing practical measures, pharmacists can optimise antimicrobial use, promote judicious prescribing, and mitigate the development of drug-resistant pathogens. Practical measures include conducting regular reviews of antimicrobial therapy, promoting evidence-based prescribing practices, and educating patients on the appropriate use of antibiotics [43]. Remember, effective patient education requires

- clear communication
- tailored information
- ongoing reinforcement
- empowering patients with knowledge about appropriate antibiotic use

Through effective antimicrobial stewardship programs, healthcare professionals can safeguard the efficacy of antimicrobial agents and preserve their effectiveness for future generations.

Further areas where pharmacists have potential roles along with educating the public

People with disabilities

Public health strategies must endeavour to guarantee that people with disabilities can readily participate in health promotion programs [44]. Though some strategies are established for them, most have been developed for common audiences. Usually, public health programs can be modified for individuals with disabilities. These may include the following [45,46];

- confirming physical accessibility
- accessible communication materials
- disability awareness,
- sensitivity training, and
- tailoring to unique needs of disability types

Environment sustainability

Pharmacists play a critical role in promoting environmental sustainability within the pharmacy profession [47]. By implementing eco-friendly practices, pharmacists can minimise the environmental impact of pharmaceutical activities.

Practical advice includes [48];

- optimising medication dispensing to reduce waste
- promoting the use of electronic prescriptions
- adopting energy-efficient technologies
- implementing proper disposal methods for pharmaceutical waste

Furthermore, pharmacists can educate patients on the importance of medication adherence to minimise unnecessary medication waste. Pharmacists can contribute to a more sustainable environment by integrating these practices into daily operations.

Development of medicine information

Developing medicine information involves using clear language, tailoring content to the audience, and incorporating visual aids [49,50].

- Organising information effectively with headings and bullet points enhances comprehension. Practical examples help patients understand medication use.
- Addressing common concerns and FAQs alleviates anxieties. Seeking input from stakeholders ensures accuracy and relevance.
- Regularly updating information reflects the latest research and regulatory changes.

By following these strategies, medicines information can empower patients and healthcare professionals with accurate and accessible knowledge about medications.

Disaster and emergency management

Disaster and emergency management is crucial for pharmacists to educate the public and ensure preparedness [51]. Pharmacists can contribute to community resilience during emergencies by actively engaging in public education.

Practical advice for pharmacists includes

- Encourage patients to maintain an emergency supply of essential medications, such as a 3-day or 7-day medication kit [52].
- Educate the public on creating a personal emergency plan, including a list of medications, contact information for healthcare providers, and instructions for medication administration during emergencies [53].
- Promote the importance of following local emergency management guidelines and staying informed about potential hazards.
- Provide resources like brochures or websites with reliable information on disaster preparedness.

Life-course vaccination

Life-course vaccination is a critical aspect of preventive healthcare, and pharmacists play a vital role in educating the public [54]. Pharmacists can contribute to improved public health outcomes by actively promoting life-course vaccination.

Practical advice for pharmacists includes [55,56]

- Emphasise the importance of vaccines at different stages of life. Encourage individuals to follow the recommended vaccination schedules, including childhood immunizations, booster shots, and vaccines for adolescents and adults.

- Educate the public about the benefits of vaccines in preventing infectious diseases and protecting against severe complications.
- Address common concerns and misconceptions regarding vaccine safety and efficacy.
- Provide accurate information on vaccine availability, locations for vaccination, and any specific recommendations for certain populations.

Conclusions

Pharmacists provide valuable information on medications, protect community health, refine individual health, and ensure efficient health services. Personal opinions may have a role in education, as respectful dialogue and understanding can bridge differences. Pharmacists can educate the public about minor ailments, chronic diseases, mental health, health literacy, and antimicrobial resistance. Additionally, they can contribute to areas like disability inclusion, environmental sustainability, medicines information, disaster management, and life-course vaccination. Through education, pharmacists empower individuals to make informed decisions about their well-being.

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