

Reporting pharmacy staff communication for OTC medicines encounters with simulated patients

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Background

- Research on OTC counseling has focused primarily on professionals' adherence to pharmacotherapeutic guidelines.
- However, effective communication has been considered pivotal for a successful ailment assessment and patient counseling on OTC treatments.

Aim

The study aims to describe pharmacy staff-customer communication when dispensing OTC medicines.

Design & Methods

Case Study at a purposely selected urban high street community pharmacy

Staff included:

- One Pharmacist
- One Pharmacy Technician
- Three Counter Assistants

Simulated Patient encounters using common symptom-based scenarios (SbS) and product-based scenarios (PbS)

Diarrhea	Dyspepsia	Dry Cough	Productive Cough	Topical Nasal Decongestant	Oral Diclofenac	Oral Emergency Contraception
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- Encounters were **audiotaped** and **transcribed verbatim**
- Participants utterances (i.e. the smallest distinguishable speech segments) were coded employing the eight level categories of a framework inspired by the **Roter Interaction Analysis System (RIAS)**:
 1. Closed Questions (Subcategories include: Medical "M" / Therapeutic "T" / Lifestyle "LS" or Psychosocial "PS")
 2. Open Questions (M / T / LS or PS)
 3. Give Information (M / T / LS or PS)
 4. Advice (M / T / LS or PS)
 5. Orientation
 6. Personal Dialogue
 7. Concern
 8. Optimism

Results

- Ten pharmacy staff-simulated patient interactions were considered for analysis
- Transcripts resulted in 129 utterances from staff
- Mean duration of encounters: 4min 20sec // Ranging from 1min 08sec to 8min 22sec

Closed Questions	Open Questions
32.0%	5.5%
Providing advice through implicit or explicit suggestion	Giving Information
23.5%	12.5%

- Longer interactions were not necessarily associated with more extensive symptoms evaluation or patient counseling
- Comparison of information-gathering in symptom-based scenarios and product-based scenarios shows that more questions were asked in the former (44% vs 31%)

- Which resulted in more information given by simulated patients in SbS (56%), when comparing with PbS (49%)

Discussion / Conclusion

Our study suggests an overuse of closed questions. This may jeopardize effective information gathering, especially if closed questions are used in the initial stages of patient consultation. The prevalence of advice giving versus the provision of information is hardly surprising, considering the framework in which pharmacists and other staff are trained. Nonetheless, in the absence of effective information gathering, tailoring advice to patients' needs and desires may prove challenging.

In conclusion, our study suggests that pharmacy staff needs to be encouraged to engage in more patient-oriented communication.