Short report

Use of drug information resources by the community pharmacist in Penang, Malaysia

Mohamed A Hassali
Associate Professor, Discipline of Social and Administrative Pharmacy, School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University Sains Malaysia Penang, Malaysia

Tahir M Khan
Senior Lecturer, College of Clinical Pharmacy, King Faisal University, Al-Ahsa, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Asrul A Shafie
Senior Lecturer, Discipline of Social and Administrative Pharmacy, School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University Sains Malaysia Penang, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Purpose This study aimed to identify the types of drug information resources used by community pharmacists in daily practice in Penang, Malaysia.

Method A cross-sectional based survey was conducted among randomly selected community pharmacists in Penang state, Malaysia. Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science Students SPSS 13. Face-to-face interviews were conducted. A total of 85 community pharmacists were approached for this study. Of these, 65 pharmacists participated in the questionnaire survey, a response rate of 78.3%.

Results Tertiary drug resources were used by the majority. About 18% were retrieving drug information from the primary drug information resources. Other sources used to provide drug information were leaflets provided by company representatives, professional peers and drug seminars organised by pharmaceutical companies.

Conclusion The use of tertiary sources of drug information was more common among community pharmacists in Penang, despite the benefits of using primary information.

Keywords: community pharmacy, drug information, Penang

Introduction

Provision of drug information to consumers and healthcare professionals has been identified as the main responsibility of the pharmacist. Early articles discussed ways for pharmacists to provide unsolicited drug consultations on patients in the hope that physicians would eventually come to rely on pharmacists as a useful drug information source. Due to consumer empowerment, the increasing number of drugs and the complexity of modern therapeutics (such as adverse drug reactions, drug–drug interactions or drug use during pregnancy and lactation) it is the role of the pharmacist to reply to the queries of consumers and healthcare professionals. The main aim of drug information is not to know the answer to every question, but is all about providing quality, unbiased and reliable drug and health information.

Nowadays three sources of drug information are available to pharmacists, i.e. primary literature, secondary literature and tertiary literature. In addition to these, web-based information can be useful if the provider is valid and reliable and has a commitment to provide unbiased information. In order to extract the desired information through these sources of literature, pharmacists need good drug and health information retrieval skills. In other words, pharmacists should be capable of differentiating between the
lay and scientific literature in order to provide valid and accurate drug information to patients and healthcare providers.5

In Malaysia, the community pharmacist is the consumers preferred choice for primary care. The main aim of this study was to evaluate the type of drug information resources used by the community pharmacist in order to provide drug information to consumers.

Methodology

A cross-sectional study design was adopted for the conduct of this study. A total of 83 community pharmacists working in the community pharmacies at different districts of Penang Island were conveniently approached by a trained data collector. At the time of the study there was a total of 165 community pharmacies in operation at Penang Island. The list of all the registered community pharmacists working at these pharmacies was obtained from the Penang State Health Office which issues annual practising licences to these pharmacies. Of the 83, 65 were willing to participate in the survey, a response rate of 78.3%. The majority (n = 53, 82%) of the community pharmacies were run independently. However, the rest were part of a pharmacy chain. Most of the pharmacists (n = 48, 74%) had been offering community pharmacy services for at least five years.

Results

A total of 83 community pharmacists were approached for this study. Of these, 65 showed a willingness to participate in the survey, a response rate of 78.3%. The majority (n = 53, 82%) of the community pharmacies were run independently. However, the rest were part of a pharmacy chain. Most of the pharmacists (n = 48, 74%) had been offering community pharmacy services for at least five years.

Whist evaluating the drug information resources used by the pharmacist, it was revealed that majority were inclined to use of tertiary drug resources. Moreover, further exploration revealed that 95% (n = 62) of the community pharmacists were used to extracting drug information from the Malaysian medical resource (MIMS). About 48% of the community pharmacists have access to the internet at their pharmacy. However, only 43% have a subscription to access a medical or pharmacy journal and only 18% of these were retrieving drug information from the primary drug information resources. In addition to these, other sources used to provide drug information to consumers were professional peers, leaflets provided by company representatives and drug seminars organised by pharmaceutical companies. The majority (94%) of consumers of the drug information were patients followed by medical doctors. Details about the types of drug information resources used are illustrated in Table 1.

Discussion

Community pharmacists are a vital source of drug information not only for the public and patients but for healthcare providers as well.3,4 Whilst discussing the importance of drug information, community pharmacists must keep their knowledge up to date about the latest drug-related issues, clinical practices and clinical guidelines in order to provide current information to the drug information seeker. The rate of knowledge augmentation will be higher if the pertinent information is retrieved from journals, books, electronic websites and magazines.4 In other words reliable, unbiased and up-to-date information can affectively be retrieved by using primary, secondary and tertiary resources of drug information.7 All of the previously mentioned resources can affectively be used by the community pharmacist in order to fulfil a drug information request. The decision on which resource will be used is often based upon availability, personal preference and the level of detail needed to provide a complete answer.

As the scope and focus of these resources can vary, most pharmacists in Penang used to consult multiple resources to provide a valid answer.5 In addition to internationally renowned resources of drug information, MIMS (the Malaysian medical resource) was the drug information resource most frequently used by pharmacists in Penang to solve drug-related queries from consumers, followed by the British National Formulary (BNF) and Martindale.7 MIMS is the only locally available source of drug information to contain advanced, complete and up-to-date information on the
pharmaceutical products available in the Malaysian market. Furthermore, information about commonly referred health conditions, warning signs, advice for customers, selling notes, treatment options and a company directory with contact details of manufacturers and distributors can be found in MIMS. MIMS appeared to be preferred by pharmacists in Penang.8

Conclusion

Community pharmacists in Penang are found to prefer tertiary sources of drug information. Tertiary sources of drug information are one of the immediate ways to answer a drug information request. However, it would be preferable to encourage the use of primary drug information so that the consumer will receive the most up-to-date information.

REFERENCES

5 Iwanowicz SL, Marciniak MW and Zeolla MM. Community pharmacy obtaining and providing health information in the community pharmacy setting. American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education 2006;70:57.
CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None.

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Tahir Mehmood Khan
Senior Lecturer/Clinical Preceptor
College of Clinical Pharmacy
King Faisal University
PO Box 400
Al-Ahsa 31982
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Email: tahir.pks@gmail.com

Accepted September 2010