



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

SELF-MEDICATION: A CURRENT CHALLENGE IN COMMUNITY

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Abstract

Self-medication is a global phenomenon and potential contributor to human pathogen resistance to antibiotics. The adverse consequences of such practices should always be emphasized to the community and steps to curb it. Rampant irrational use of antimicrobials without medical guidance may result in greater probability of inappropriate, incorrect, or undue therapy, missed diagnosis, delays in appropriate treatment, pathogen resistance and increased morbidity. This review focused on the self-medication of allopathic drugs, their use, its safety and reason for using it. It would be safe, if the people who are using it, have sufficient knowledge about its dose, time of intake, side effect on over dose, but due to lack of information it can cause serious effects such as antibiotic resistance, skin problem, hypersensitivity and allergy. There is need to augment awareness and implement legislations to promote judicious and safe practices. Improved knowledge and understanding about self-medication may result in rationale use and thus limit emerging microbial resistance issues. Articles which were published in peer reviewed journals, World Self-medication Industry and World Health Organization websites relating to self-medication reviewed.

Key words: Allopathic drugs, antibiotic resistance, self-medication

INTRODUCTION

Every day, we are practicing self-medication in the form of self-care of our health. Around the 1960's in the West self-care and self-medication were regarded as unnecessary and potentially even unhealthy practices. This paternalistic approach to medicine, supported by health systems designed to treat sickness remains a familiar aspect of health care in many countries to this day. Self-medication has traditionally been defined as "the taking of drugs, herbs or home remedies on one's own initiative, or on the advice of another person, without consulting a doctor.

Major problems related to self-medication are wastage of resources, increased resistance of pathogens and causes serious health hazards such as adverse reaction and prolonged suffering. Antimicrobial resistance is a current problem world-wide particularly in developing countries where antibiotics are available without any prescription. Every day, we are practicing self-medication in the form of self-care of our health. This paternalistic approach to medicine, supported by health systems designed to treat sickness disease remains a familiar aspect of health care in many countries to this day. Self-medication has traditionally been defined as "the taking of drugs, herbs or home remedies on one's own initiative, or on the advice of another person, without consulting a doctor.

Hence, the government should take necessary steps to regulate responsible self-medication. This can be done by making availability of safe drugs along with proper instructions about its use and if in need consulting a physician. In India, it is very common to see self-medication practice and which is emerging challenge to health care providers.

The Benefits of Responsible Self-medication

Prevention of disease through self-care and responsible self-medication. Sources The common sources of self-medication are previous prescription, friends, advertisements, chemist shop and books. Factors influencing Self-medication is influenced by many factors such as education, family, society, law, availability of drugs and exposure to advertisements.

Potential benefits Individual level

- An active role in his or her own health care
- Self-reliance in preventing or relieving minor symptoms or conditions
- Education opportunities on specific health issues (i.e. stop smoking aids and products to treat heartburn)
- Convenience
- Economy, particularly since medical consultations will be reduced or avoided. [

At community level Good self-medication can also provide benefits such as:

- Saving scarce medical resources from being wasted on minor conditions
- Lowering the costs of community funded health care programs
- Reducing absenteeism from work due to minor symptoms
- Reduce the pressure on medical services where health care personnel are insufficient
- Increase the availability of health care to populations living in rural or remote areas.

Potential risks Individual level

- Incorrect self-diagnosis
- Failure to seek appropriate medical advice promptly
- Incorrect choice of therapy
- Failure to recognize special pharmacological risks
- Failure to recognize or self-diagnosis contraindications, interactions, warnings and precautions
- Failure to recognize that the same active substance is already being taken under a different name
- Failure to report current self-medication to the prescribing physician (double medication/harmful interaction)
- Failure to recognize or report adverse drug reactions
- Incorrect route of administration

- Inadequate or excessive dosage
- Excessively prolonged use
- Risk of dependence and abuse
- Food and drug interaction
- Storage in incorrect conditions or beyond the recommended shelf life.

Community level

Improper self-medication could result in an increase in drug induced disease and in wasteful public expenditure.

Prevention of Potential Risks Associated with Self-medication

Role of health profession

Health professionals are one who has potential role in preventing risks of self-medication. Because he is the one who work on three main therapeutic aspects of professionalism in his daily practice: Information, therapeutic advice and education.[3] Information Whenever health professionals are prescribing drugs, he should give proper instructions and explain for what it is prescribed so that it will be helpful for the patient to understand and making his own decisions. Given information should be at patient's comprehension level so that it will be helpful for them to understand its management.

Therapeutic advice

Lack of therapeutic compliance is a serious problem in both acute and chronic treatments and reflects a poorly-understood or incomplete description of the treatment aims. If patients are not well-informed they are unlikely to use medication correctly. However, if the directions for use and the limitations of a given drug are explained-for example, dose, frequency of dose, treatment course, how to take it, etc., then patients have a set of guidelines which will help them to use the drug correctly, both now and in the future.

Education

In appropriate self-medication is the result of the medical model from which people have learnt. Proper health education should be given to the patients. By regularly adopting an educational attitude we can have an effect on large sectors of the population, on people who, in turn, may directly influence their friends and family. This aspect is of particular importance with respect to the self-medication of children by their parents or takes cares.

Role of pharmacist

He is one of the key role players in educating his customers about the proper use of medicines, which are intended for self-medication. For that necessary steps have to be taken in his training and practice. Pharmacists play a valuable role in identifying, solving and preventing drug-related problems for the purpose of achieving optimal patient outcomes and quality of life. Ambulatory based pharmacists have the opportunity and responsibility to foster safe, appropriate, effective and economical use of all medications, especially those therapies patients are self-selecting. **Communicator**

In order to address the condition of the patient appropriately the pharmacist must ask the patient key questions and pass on relevant information to him or her (e.g. How to take the medicines and how to deal with safety issues).

Quality drug supplies

The pharmacist must ensure that the products he/she purchases are from reputable sources and of good quality.

Trainer and supervisor

To achieve this pharmacist must develop a protocol for referral to the pharmacist, protocols for community health workers involved with the handling and distribution of medicines.

Collaborator

It is imperative that pharmacists develop quality collaborative relationships with the other health care professionals, national professional associations, the pharmaceutical industry, governments (local/national), patients and general public.

Health promoter

As a member of the health-care team, the pharmacist must participate in health screening to identify health problems and those at risk in the community, participate in health promotion campaigns to raise awareness of health issues and disease prevention, provide advice to individuals to help them make informed health choices.

Conclusion

self-medication of allopathic drugs, their use, its safety and reason for using it. It would be safe, if the people who are using it, have sufficient knowledge about its dose, time of intake, side effect on over dose, but due to lack of information it can cause serious effects such as antibiotic resistance, skin problem, hypersensitivity and allergy. Hence, developing country like India where we have poor economic status, education status as well as poor health care facilities. People have less knowledge regarding risks associated with their self-medication. We are on the edge of sword whether to promote self-medication or not. Hence it is recommended that holistic approach should be taken to prevent this problem, which includes proper awareness and education regarding the self-medication and strictness regarding pharmaceutical advertising. Dispensing modes in the needs to be improved through proper education, strict regulatory and managerial strategies to make health care easily accessible and cost-effective.

Health professionals have to spend some extra time in educating patients regarding the same. Improved knowledge and understanding about self-medication may result in rationale use and thus limit emerging microbial resistance issues.

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