

The opinions of Gold Coast pharmacy staff concerning increased availability of non-prescription medicines: a qualitative study

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Introduction

Reclassification of medicines from prescription to non-prescription increases consumers' timely access to treatment, promoting self-management of minor ailments. Recently, Australia has slowed the reclassification of medicines compared to Britain and New Zealand. Historically, there were concerns over pharmacist management of risk for newly reclassified medicines which are not well supported by evidence.^[1]

Aims/Objectives

To gauge opinions on increased non-prescription availability of current prescription medicines amongst pharmacy staff working in community pharmacies on the Gold Coast, Australia.

Research Design & Methodology

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of pharmacists and support staff on the Gold Coast, Queensland in May 2015. Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and summarised. A thematic analysis approach was adopted. Institutional ethical clearance was granted



Medicines available OTC in New Zealand or UK but unavailable OTC in Australia

Results

Interviewed: 9 pharmacists, 4 dispensary staff and 2 pharmacy assistants from 8 pharmacies.

Key themes: Access to medicines and patient safety.

Benefits: Increased access to treatments for minor ailments and continued supply of medicines for long-term health conditions.

Protocols and training: To support reclassification were desired.

Concerns: Increased sales focus and potential harm from medicines misuse.

Barriers: The process being external to the pharmacy profession, negative influence of other health professionals, and limited recognition of the skills and value of pharmacists by the general public.

Perspectives and concerns varied.

Medicines suitable for reclassification: Focussed on treatments for chronic conditions when doctors had previously diagnosed and prescribed them, e.g. antihypertensives, asthma preventers, some antibiotics and oral contraceptives.

Medicines unsuitable for reclassification: Medicines prone to abuse or misuse, or those perceived as hazardous.

Conclusion/Discussion

Two distinct drivers for reclassification identified:

- Continued access to long-term medicines and
- Increased access to minor ailment treatments.

Patient support for continued access has been identified in Australia,^[2] while overseas, reclassifications have increased timely access to acute treatments.

References

1. Erwin J, Britten N, Jones R. General practitioners' views on the over-the-counter availability of H2-antagonists. *Br J Gen Pract* 1997;47(415):99-102.
2. McMillan SS, Sav A, Kelly F, King MA, Whitty JA, Wheeler AJ. Is the pharmacy profession innovative enough?: meeting the needs of Australian residents with chronic conditions and their carers using the nominal group technique. *BMC Health Serv Res* 2014;14(1):1.