

Patient Counselling and Communication

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ABSTRACT

To understand the proper use of medicines, patients need to be educated by pharmacists through patient counselling. It is a process where pharmacists guide patients on the correct use of their prescribed drugs. The primary objective of patient counselling is to promote the rational use of medicines, thereby enhancing therapeutic effectiveness. Clinical pharmacists play a vital role in this process, as effective counseling is a key element in achieving optimal therapeutic outcomes. Counseling is the application of the full range of communication skills in a specific area of professional expertise. Dispensing medicines to patients or their representatives are not limited to simply handing over a kit of drugs; it also involves ensuring that the right medication reaches the right person along with accurate information. Clinical pharmacists are in regular communication with patients and take part in making clinical interventions along with the countless technical tasks done behind the counter. Their contribution is crucial in enhancing patients' understanding of their medical conditions and treatment. Pharmacists help reduce medication errors, minimize adverse events and drug interactions, and improve patient adherence. Effective patient counseling helps individuals gain a clearer understanding of their illness, the required lifestyle modifications, and their pharmacotherapy, thereby improving treatment adherence. Pharmacists hold significant responsibility in counseling patients with chronic conditions. To be effective, a counseling pharmacist must have comprehensive knowledge and strong communication abilities utilizing both verbal and non-verbal skills. This might assist the client in focusing on feelings, experiences, or behavior with the goal of achieving positive change and establishing a trusting connection. Confidentiality is essential for successful counselling. Through patient counseling, pharmacists must educate patients on how to effectively use medications. Main goal of patient counselling is the rational use of medicines. Hence it shows patient counselling improves therapeutic efficacy.

Introduction

Patient counselling refers to the process of providing information advice and assistance to help patient use their medication appropriately. The information and advice are given by the pharmacist directly to the patient or to the patient's representative and may also include information about the patient's illness or recommended lifestyle changes. Although the information is often provided orally, written materials may be included [1]. Despite the fact that every pharmacist approach client counseling differently, they all need to follow some fundamental guidelines, like introducing the client and identifying the right patient. [2].

As we approach the counter, we must pay attention to the patient's nonverbal cues for any communication hurdles that must be overcome. A pharmacist in a clinical setting faces a variety of obstacles when providing counselling services. Patient counseling's most important job is to improve patients' quality of life and deliver great care [3]. Pharmacists today recognize that the practice of pharmacy has grown throughout time to include not just the preparation and distribution of medicines to patients, but also engage with patients and other health care providers in all aspects of pharmaceutical care. Patient counselling improves patient care from this patient-centered perspective. Providing competitive and competent pharmacy services is critical from the pharmacist's perspective [5].

Patient counselling and patient–pharmacist interaction are clearly important aspects of the pharmacist's profession nowadays. Assessing the patient's understanding of the therapy, including correct use and adverse effects of the medicine; enhancing patient compliance; and motivating the patient to take an active role in health management are all goals of patient counselling. Patient counselling has been shown in studies to improve patient care in a variety of ways. Increasing patients' comprehension and management of their medical ailment to reduce medication mistakes reducing the occurrence of negative medication reactions and drug-drug interactions [2].

Patient outcomes and satisfaction with care are improving.

This counselling should be based on a review of the patient's previous health and medication history, as well as a basic grasp of the patient's nature and surroundings [2].

Steps during patient counseling

Counseling is a two-way communication process, and interaction between the patient and pharmacist is essential for counseling to be effective.



Figure 1. Steps during patient counseling

Step:1: - Preparing for the session

This is the first and very important step to ensure effective counselling.

- The pharmacist should carefully review the prescription, diagnosis, and patient history.
- Check for drug allergies, interactions, contraindications, and special conditions (e.g., pregnancy, chronic diseases).
- Collect all necessary materials such as medication strips, information leaflets, and demonstration aids (like inhalers or insulin pens).
- Arrange a quiet, private, and comfortable area to maintain patient confidentiality.
- Plan the counselling points in advance (dose, duration, precautions, lifestyle advice).
- Set clear objectives such as improving medication adherence and ensuring safe drug use.

Proper preparation avoids errors and improves the quality of counselling.

Step:2: - Opening for the session

This step focuses on building trust and starting effective communication.

- Greet the patient politely and create a friendly environment.
- Introduce yourself as a pharmacist.
- Confirm the patient's identity (name, age).
- Explain the purpose of counselling in simple words:
 - I will explain how to take your medicines properly and safely.
- Assess the patient's existing knowledge by asking open-ended questions like:
 - What did your doctor tell you about your treatment?
 - Are you taking any other medicines?"

A good opening builds rapport and encourages patient participation.

Step: 3: - Counseling content:

- a. *Medication Information:* Explain the medicine name and its purpose clearly.
- b. *Dosage and Administration:* Tell how much, how often, and how to take the medicine.
- c. *Expected Benefits:* Inform the patient about expected results and time for effect.
- d. *Side Effects and Precautions:* Describe common side effects and necessary safety measures.
- e. *Demonstration (if required):* Show and confirm the correct method of using devices.
- f. *Adherence and Lifestyle Advice:* Guide on completing treatment and maintaining healthy habits.
- g. *Clarification:* Encourage questions and clear all patient doubts

Step:4: -Closing the session:

Closing a patient counseling session is about confirming understanding and ensuring safe medication use. Before finishing, the pharmacist should check whether the patient has clearly understood the purpose, dosage, and duration of the medication. This can be done using simple feedback questions like asking the patient to recall what the medicine is for or how long they should take it. Patients should also be encouraged to ask any remaining doubts or concerns. If time allows, the pharmacist can briefly summarize the key points to reinforce important information.

In addition, gathering relevant background information such as past medication history, allergies, and lifestyle habits like diet, smoking, or alcohol use helps personalize the advice. Open-ended questions (for example, asking what the doctor explained about the illness or requesting the patient to describe their symptoms) promote better communication and understanding. At the same time, the pharmacist should avoid making the patient uncomfortable with overly direct or insensitive questions. Finally, essential practical advice should be included, such as what to do if a dose is missed and whether any monitoring (like blood tests) is required. This approach ensures that the patient leaves the session informed, confident, and prepared to use their medication safely [6].

Barriers to effective patient counselling

Community pharmacies may not offer patient counseling for a variety of reasons, or "barriers." These obstacles fall under the following categories:

- **Patient based barriers**
- **Provider based barriers**
- **System based barriers**

Patient based barriers

Many patients in India are not aware that pharmacists can offer counseling and typically inquire about prescription use from their prescriber. Language and gender barriers may also prevent patients from inquiring about prescription usage from the pharmacist.

Provider based barriers

A lack of knowledge and counseling abilities prevents many pharmacists from feeling confident enough to offer patient advice. Another significant obstacle in many practice settings is a high patient load for prescription filling.

System based barriers

In India, counseling is not a mandatory legal requirement and officially pharmacists are not entitled to charge for dispensing or for the information provided to patients. These factors act as regulatory and financial disincentives to providing a counselling service. Lack of privacy in many busy community and hospital pharmacies can also be a problem [7].

Strategies to overcome barriers

Patient based barriers

These focus on improving patient understanding and involvement:

- a. *Improve patient education:* Use simple, non-technical language to explain medicines.
- b. *Enhance communication:* Encourage open discussion and actively listen to patient concerns.
- c. *Use visual aids:* Apply pictograms, charts, or labels for better understanding (especially for illiterate patients).
- d. *Build trust and rapport:* Be friendly, respectful, and empathetic to increase patient confidence.
- e. *Motivate adherence:* Explain the importance of completing therapy and consequences of non-adherence.
- f. *Address beliefs and misconceptions:* Correct myths and provide accurate information.
- g. A solid background in handling similar circumstances through preparation.
- h. Pharmacy management's effective use of time, activities, and people resources.

Provider based barriers

These focus on improving pharmacist skills and approach:

- a. *Continuous professional development:* Regularly update knowledge and counselling skills.
- b. *Improve communication skills:* Use clear, confident, and patient-friendly language.
- c. *Encourage patient participation:* Ask questions and involve patients in decision-making.
- d. *Use counselling aids:* Utilize compliance aids, demonstration tools, and written materials.
- e. *Show empathy and respect:* Address patient concerns seriously and maintain a supportive attitude.
- f. *Cultural and gender sensitivity:* Be considerate of patient preferences (e.g., female pharmacist if needed).

System based barriers

- a. *Provide a separate counselling area:* Ensure privacy and confidentiality.
- b. *Improve pharmacy setup:* Arrange proper space and facilities to avoid interruptions.
- c. *Implement supportive policies:* Establish guidelines that promote patient counselling.
- d. *Manage workload and time:* Allocate sufficient time for counselling activities.
- e. *Ensure availability of resources:* Provide educational materials and counselling tools [6].

Benefits of patient counselling

Benefits to pharmacists

- a. Improved professional studies from the perspective of medical professionals and patients.
- b. The creation of a crucial element of patient care that technologists are unable to provide
- c. Higher job satisfaction as a result of improved patient outcomes.

- d. A service that enhances the experience of the patient. Revenue from the payment of counseling services is now small but growing. [2]

Benefits to patients

- a. Improved patient comprehension of their condition and how medicine helps treat it.
- b. Better compliance with medicines
- c. More efficient medication management
- d. A decrease in the frequency of side effects and needless medical expenses
- e. A higher standard of living for the patient
- f. Improved coping mechanisms for unpleasant drug-related consequences.
- g. A better working relationship between the pharmacist and the patient [7].

Conclusion

Effective communication between a patient and a pharmacist is known as patient counseling. It is believed that patient counseling serves as a bridge between the patient and the pharmacist. Patient counseling can help patients retain and use their drugs sensibly.

Appendices

Appendix I: Patient Counselling Checklist

- a. Greet the patient and establish rapport.
- b. Verify patient identity and prescription details.
- c. Explain the purpose of each medication.
- d. Discuss dosage, route, frequency, and duration.
- e. Inform about possible side effects and precautions.
- f. Advise on storage conditions.
- g. Encourage adherence and follow-up visits.
- h. Provide written information if necessary.

Appendix II: Sample Patient Counselling Record Form

Patient Name:

Age/Gender:

Diagnosis:

Medications Counseled:

Counselling Topics Covered:

Counsellor's Name & Signature:

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Conflict of Interest

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