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Over the counter drugs and drug safety

Nagalakshmi Ramamoorthi
Safety Writer, United Kingdom

Introduction: Today, there has been a constant increase in the self-medication phenomenon among patients due to the large availability of drugs available over the counter. Overuse can lead to misuse or abuse of OTC medicines and can cause addiction and dependency.

Incidence of OTC abuse: OTC medicine abuse was identified in many countries. A comprehensive search of international empirical and review literature between 1990-2011 identified five key medicine classes i.e., codeine/opioid based cough medicines, non-opioid based medicines, sedative antihistamines, decongestants, and laxatives.

Harms associated with OTC abuse: A range of problems and harms associated with OTC medicine abuse were identified and these comprised three broad categories such as direct harms associated with the primary ingredient, physiological harms due to the adverse effects of another active ingredient, economic costs, and effects on personal and social life. An observational study in Finland identified various drug related problems (DRP) involving fifty-two community pharmacies using a questionnaire survey. They documented 339 drug related problems and to resolve them 641 pharmacy interventions emerged.

Interventions and support: Pharmacists play a major role in preventing DRP associated with OTC drugs thereby decreasing adverse events and drug-drug reactions. Most common suggested interventions include providing training to pharmacist to increase awareness among both public and health care professionals, counselling consumers to abuse potential of products, advising them to contact their doctor when needed, limiting advertisements, and making bold warnings on packets etc. OTC control varies across the globe and stricter in Poland, Germany, Austria, France, and Sweden.

Addressing the evidence gap and Conclusion: Robust methodologies should be used to select a representative cohort of users to answer safety related questions. Such survey data are often got unnoticed by sponsors. Since they to help quantify the benefit of OTC status it should be published in the literature. Training and practice of pharmacy-based interventions should be encouraged to avoid the harms associated with OTC abuse.



Figure 1: OTC Drug related problems and Pharmacy interventions

Recent Publications

1. Over-the-counter medicine abuse – a review of the literature - PMC (nih.gov).
2. International Journal of Clinical Pharmacy (2020) 42:786–795 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11096-020-00984-8>
3. Fleming G. F., Mc Elnay J. C., Hughes C. M. Development of a community pharmacy-based model to identify and treat OTC drug abuse/misuse: A pilot study. *Pharmacy World & Science*. 2004;26(5):282–288
4. Jacek Dułęba , Urszula Religioni , Emilia Słodka , Andrzej Fal , Jerzy Krysiński , Piotr Merks. The Awareness of Risks Associated with OTC Drugs Available in Non-Pharmacy Outlets among Polish Patients-A Cross-Sectional Study. *Healthcare (Basel)* 2021 Feb 9;9(2):187. doi: 10.3390/healthcare9020187
5. Safety concerns with over-the-counter drugs (selfcarejournal.com)

Biography

Nagalakshmi Ramamoorthi is a physician by training, having graduated in 2012 with a MD degree in Pharmacology. She has experience working as a Senior Medical Affairs Advisor and an investigator for conducting several phase-1 clinical trials. Her experience includes conducting clinical studies, respond to questions from health authorities, manage consumer queries using healthcare databases, performing scientific literature searches, writing systematic literature review reports, analyze and comprehend complex safety data and using this skill to produce high quality, scientifically accurate and balanced documents covering a wide range of health and hygiene products.

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