

Patients' Perceptions of Medication Counseling Provided by Inpatient Pharmacists: A Qualitative Study on Impact on Medication-Taking Behaviors and Treatment Understanding

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Abstract:

This qualitative study investigates patients' perceptions of medication counseling provided by inpatient pharmacists in hospital settings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants to explore the impact of pharmacist-led counseling on medication-taking behaviors and treatment understanding. Thematic analysis identified key themes including the effectiveness of counseling in enhancing medication adherence and patient empowerment in self-management. Participants valued clear communication, personalized care, and the pharmacist's role in addressing medication concerns. Challenges such as time constraints and the need for post-discharge follow-up were also noted. Findings highlight the crucial role of pharmacist-led counseling in optimizing patient outcomes and suggest implications for improving pharmacy practice in hospital settings.

Keywords: medication counseling, inpatient pharmacists, patient perceptions, medication adherence, qualitative research

Introduction

In healthcare settings, effective medication counseling plays a pivotal role in promoting patient adherence to prescribed treatments and enhancing their understanding of medication regimens. Pharmacists, particularly those in inpatient settings, serve as crucial healthcare providers in facilitating these interactions. The quality of pharmacist-patient communication and counseling can significantly impact patients' medication-taking behaviors and treatment outcomes.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), medication adherence remains a global challenge, with non-adherence contributing to medication-related hospitalizations, increased healthcare costs, and suboptimal health outcomes (WHO, 2003). Effective medication counseling by pharmacists has been shown to improve adherence rates and patient satisfaction (Fornos et al., 2006; Ibrahim and Wertheimer, 2017). Inpatient pharmacists, in particular, have a unique opportunity to engage with patients during hospitalization, offering personalized counseling tailored to their immediate healthcare needs.

Despite the recognized importance of pharmacist-patient interactions, there is a gap in understanding how patients perceive and experience medication counseling provided by inpatient pharmacists. This qualitative study aims to address this gap by exploring patients' perceptions of medication counseling in hospital settings. By capturing patients' perspectives, this research seeks to elucidate the impact of pharmacist-led counseling on medication-taking behaviors and treatment understanding, thereby informing strategies to optimize patient care and outcomes.

Literature Review

Medication counseling by healthcare professionals, particularly pharmacists, is integral to ensuring optimal patient outcomes through improved medication adherence and treatment understanding. In hospital settings, inpatient pharmacists play a crucial role in providing tailored counseling to patients, addressing medication-related concerns, and enhancing therapeutic outcomes.

Effective medication counseling encompasses various aspects, including patient education, medication management strategies, and fostering patient engagement in their treatment plan. According to the American Pharmacists Association (APhA), pharmacists' interventions significantly impact medication adherence, resulting in better clinical outcomes and reduced healthcare costs (APhA, 2019). Inpatient pharmacists, due to their direct access to patients during hospital stays, are well-positioned to deliver personalized counseling that addresses immediate medication needs and facilitates transitions of care post-discharge (Olsson et al., 2014).

Research indicates that pharmacist-led medication counseling improves patient understanding of prescribed medications and promotes adherence. Studies have shown that patients who receive comprehensive counseling from pharmacists are more likely to adhere to their medication regimens and experience fewer medication-related problems (Kosari et al., 2020; Amadori et al., 2010). This counseling often includes information on medication dosages, administration schedules, potential side effects, and strategies to manage them effectively.

Furthermore, patient satisfaction with pharmacist-provided counseling is closely linked to improved health outcomes. A study by Hirsch et al. (2014) demonstrated that patients who felt adequately informed about their medications by pharmacists reported higher levels of satisfaction and were more likely to adhere to their prescribed therapies. Effective communication and patient-centered care, key components of pharmacist counseling, contribute significantly to enhancing patient trust and collaboration in healthcare decision-making (Parnis et al., 2020).

Despite the documented benefits of pharmacist-led medication counseling, challenges exist in ensuring consistent and effective delivery across healthcare settings. Factors such as time constraints, variability in pharmacist training, and patient-specific barriers (e.g., health literacy, cultural beliefs) can influence the quality and effectiveness of counseling interactions (Nkansah et al., 2010; Lapane et al., 2007).

This literature review underscores the importance of exploring patients' perceptions of medication counseling provided by inpatient pharmacists. By understanding how patients perceive and experience pharmacist-led counseling, healthcare providers can identify opportunities to enhance communication strategies, improve patient education efforts, and ultimately optimize medication management practices in hospital settings.

Methodology

This qualitative study aimed to explore patients' perceptions of medication counseling provided by inpatient pharmacists, focusing on its impact on medication-taking behaviors and treatment understanding. The study utilized a phenomenological approach to capture rich, descriptive data that elucidate patients' lived experiences and subjective interpretations of pharmacist-led counseling.

Participants

20 Participants were recruited from inpatient hospital setting. A purposive sampling method was employed to ensure diversity in patient demographics and experiences. Eligibility criteria included patients who had received medication counseling from inpatient pharmacists during their hospital stay and were able to provide informed consent.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in-person at the hospital or via video conferencing for patients who had been discharged. The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and included open-ended questions to explore various aspects of medication counseling experiences. Probing questions allowed for deeper exploration of themes such as satisfaction with counseling content, perceived impact on medication adherence, and clarity of medication-related information provided by pharmacists.

Data Analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach involved identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the data to uncover recurring ideas and meanings related to patients' perceptions of pharmacist-led counseling. Initial codes were generated through line-by-line coding, followed by grouping similar codes into broader themes. Rigorous data analysis was conducted to ensure credibility and reliability of findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study, ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity of data. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion.

Limitations

Limitations of the study included potential biases inherent in qualitative research, such as researcher subjectivity in data interpretation and the influence of participant recall bias. Additionally, the study's findings may not be generalizable to broader patient populations due to the specific context and sample characteristics.

Findings

Theme 1: Effectiveness of Medication Counseling

Sub-theme 1.1: Empowerment in Self-Management

Participants expressed a sense of empowerment in managing their health conditions through the knowledge gained from pharmacist-led counseling sessions. One participant noted, "Understanding why I need to take each medication made me feel more in control of my health. I feel more confident managing my condition now."

Sub-theme 1.2: Addressing Medication Concerns

Several participants highlighted the pharmacist's role in addressing their concerns and uncertainties about medications. A participant shared, "I had concerns about potential side effects, and the pharmacist explained what to expect and how to manage them. It eased my worries."

Theme 2: Communication and Patient Engagement

Sub-theme 2.1: Clear Communication Styles

Participants appreciated pharmacists who used clear and accessible language during counseling sessions. A participant mentioned, "The pharmacist didn't use medical jargon. They explained things in a way that was easy for me to understand."

Sub-theme 2.2: Encouraging Patient Questions

Many participants valued pharmacists who encouraged questions and actively engaged them in discussions about their medications. One participant stated, "The pharmacist asked if I had any questions multiple times during our discussion. It made me feel like my concerns were important."

Theme 3: Impact on Treatment Understanding

Sub-theme 3.1: Holistic Understanding of Treatment Plan

Participants emphasized the importance of pharmacist-led counseling in providing a holistic understanding of their treatment plan beyond medication management. A participant explained, "The pharmacist talked about lifestyle changes and how they complemented my medications. It gave me a broader perspective on managing my health."

Sub-theme 3.2: Integration with Other Healthcare Providers

Several participants highlighted the pharmacist's role in bridging communication gaps between healthcare providers, which enhanced their overall treatment understanding. A participant noted, "The pharmacist communicated with my doctor to clarify my treatment plan. It helped me see the bigger picture of my care."

Theme 4: Emotional Support and Patient-Centered Care

Sub-theme 4.1: Compassionate Approach

Participants valued pharmacists who demonstrated empathy and compassion during counseling sessions, acknowledging the emotional impact of their health conditions. A participant shared, "The pharmacist took the time to listen to my concerns about starting a new medication. It made me feel like they cared about more than just giving me pills."

Sub-theme 4.2: Tailoring Counseling to Individual Needs

Many participants appreciated pharmacists who tailored counseling to their specific health circumstances and preferences. One participant mentioned, "I have allergies, and the pharmacist made sure to discuss potential interactions with my other medications. It showed they were paying attention to my individual needs."

Discussion

The findings of this qualitative study provide valuable insights into patients' perceptions of medication counseling provided by inpatient pharmacists, highlighting several key themes that elucidate the impact of these interactions on medication-taking behaviors and treatment understanding. This discussion interprets the findings in relation to existing literature, explores their implications for pharmacy practice, and identifies avenues for future research.

Effectiveness of Medication Counseling

The theme of effectiveness emerged prominently in participants' accounts, emphasizing the clarity and understanding gained through pharmacist-led counseling. Consistent with previous research (Kosari et al., 2020; Amadori, 2010), participants appreciated the comprehensiveness of information provided, which enhanced their confidence in managing their medications. Effective communication strategies, such as using clear language and addressing patient concerns, were identified as critical factors influencing the perceived effectiveness of counseling (Hirsch et al., 2014).

Communication and Patient Engagement

Clear communication and patient engagement were integral to positive counseling experiences reported by participants. The findings underscore the importance of pharmacists fostering an open dialogue with patients, encouraging questions, and actively involving them in discussions about their treatment (Parnis, 2020). This approach not only enhances patient satisfaction but also promotes shared decision-making, aligning with principles of patient-centered care (Olsson et al., 2014).

Impact on Treatment Understanding

Participants highlighted the role of pharmacist-led counseling in fostering a holistic understanding of their treatment plans, beyond medication management alone. This finding supports the concept of pharmacists as integral members of the healthcare team, contributing to comprehensive patient care through education on medication adherence and lifestyle modifications (Nkansah et al., 2010; Lapane et al., 2007). Integration with other healthcare providers was identified as beneficial in enhancing treatment coherence and patient empowerment (Kosari et al., 2020).

Challenges and Recommendations

Despite the positive feedback, participants identified challenges such as time constraints during counseling sessions and the need for post-discharge follow-up. Addressing these challenges is crucial for optimizing the impact of pharmacist-led counseling in inpatient settings. Strategies to enhance counseling effectiveness may include workflow adjustments to allocate more time for patient interactions and implementing structured follow-up protocols to reinforce medication education post-discharge (Lapane et al., 2007; Amadori, 2010).

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations of this study include its focus on a specific hospital setting and the potential for participant bias in self-reporting experiences. Future research could explore the longitudinal impact of pharmacist-led counseling on medication adherence and health outcomes across diverse patient populations and healthcare settings. Additionally, investigating the perspectives of healthcare providers and pharmacists themselves could provide a comprehensive understanding of collaborative care models and their implications for patient-centered outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the significant role of inpatient pharmacists in enhancing patient medication adherence and treatment understanding through effective counseling practices. By addressing communication barriers, optimizing time management, and integrating patient-centered approaches into pharmacy practice, healthcare providers can further enhance the quality of care and improve patient outcomes in hospital settings.

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Appendix: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Introduction and Warm-Up

- Can you describe your experience with medication counseling provided by inpatient pharmacists during your hospital stay?
- What were your expectations regarding medication counseling before meeting with the pharmacist?

2. Understanding of Medications

- How did the pharmacist explain your medications to you? Was the information provided clear and understandable?
- Did the pharmacist discuss potential side effects or interactions of your medications? How did this information impact your understanding and confidence in taking the medications?

3. Impact on Medication Adherence

- Did the counseling session influence how you take your medications now that you are home? If so, how?
- Have you encountered any challenges in following the medication instructions discussed during counseling? How did the pharmacist address these challenges?

4. Patient-Centered Care

- How did you feel about the pharmacist's approach during the counseling session? Did you feel comfortable asking questions or expressing concerns?
- Did the pharmacist involve you in decision-making about your medications? Please describe any instances where you felt your preferences or needs were considered.

5. Suggestions for Improvement

- Is there anything you think could have been done differently during the counseling session to improve your experience?
- What additional support or information would you have liked to receive from the pharmacist that was not discussed during the counseling session?

6. Overall Experience and Satisfaction

- How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the medication counseling provided by the pharmacist?
- In your opinion, how important is pharmacist-led counseling in a hospital setting for patients like yourself?

7. Demographic Information

- Could you please share some information about your age, gender, and any relevant medical conditions or reasons for hospitalization?