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Background and Importance

Opioid prescribing has been associated with what is described as an “opioid crisis” in the United States. Pharmacists are in unique positions to offer beneficial services to promote the safe use of opioid medicines. Low confidence, knowledge, and training have been associated with barriers in providing opioid dispensing services.

Materials and Methods

A modified version of the Opioid Therapy Provider Survey was sent to 178 community pharmacists between April and September 2023 to assess their confidence and behaviors in dispensing opioid medicines. Participants confidence was assessed with ten statements around counseling and advice, dispensing, abuse perception, communication with providers, and practice protocols that were measured using Spearman’s statistical correlation.

Aim and Objectives

The primary aim was to investigate the association between community pharmacists’ confidence and practice behaviors in the dispensing of opioid medications.

Results

The study response was 28%. Staff pharmacists accounted for 35% and pharmacy managers 32% of the respondents. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the pharmacists had been in practice for more than 7 years. Forty-seven percent (47%) of the pharmacists dispensed over 30 opioid medicines per week. Ninety-one (91%) percent of the respondents felt confident in dispensing opioids in their practice.

There was a strong, positive correlation between pharmacists’ comfort when: (1) following a recommended opioid dispensing protocol ($r_s = .593, p < .001$), (2) counseling patients on side effects ($r_s = .480, p = .005$), (3) information provided by pain specialists ($r_s = .515, p = .002$), and (4) having a consistent practice approach in dispensing opioids ($r_s = .604, p < .001$).

Response to the Provider Survey

Opioid Therapy Provider Survey Questions	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1. Dispensing of prescriptions for patients on opioids is a problem in my practice (P)	6 (18.2%)	6 (18.2%)	9 (27.3%)	8 (24.2%)	4 (12.1%)
2. I am comfortable in dispensing opioids with support from management (C)	16 (48.5%)	14 (42.4%)	0	1 (3.0%)	2 (6.1%)
3. I fear my patients will become addicted to opioids (P)	9 (27.3%)	10 (30.3%)	9 (27.3%)	1 (3.0%)	4 (12.1%)
4. I am dissatisfied with communication with pain specialists (P)	11 (33.3%)	12 (36.4%)	2 (6.1%)	4 (12.1%)	3 (9.1%)
5. I follow a recommended opioid dispensing protocol (C)	13 (39.4%)	9 (27.3%)	3 (9.1%)	3 (9.1%)	5 (15.2%)
6. I feel more comfortable dispensing opioids when other treatments are ineffective (C)	21 (63.6%)	8 (24.2%)	3 (9.1%)	1 (3.0%)	0
7. I can identify patients at risk for misuse of pain medication (C)	8 (24.2%)	15 (45.5%)	5 (15.2%)	3 (9.1%)	1 (3.0%)
8. I am confident in my ability to counsel patients on opioid side effects, overdose, and antidotes (C)	25 (75.8%)	7 (21.2%)	0	0	1 (3.0%)
9. I am satisfied with the medical information provided by the pain specialist when dispensing new opioid prescriptions (C)	5 (15.2%)	6 (18.2%)	9 (27.3%)	11 (33.3%)	2 (6.1%)
10. A consistent approach in my practice has helped me feel comfortable in dispensing opioids (C)	13 (39.4%)	13 (39.4%)	6 (18.2%)	0	1 (3.0%)

Correlation Between Responses to Survey Questions and Provider Confidence

Survey Response	Spearman’s coefficient	p-value
1. I follow a recommended opioid dispensing protocol (C)	.593	.001
2. I am confident in my ability to counsel patients on opioid side effects, overdose, and antidotes (C)	.480	.005
3. I am satisfied with the medical information provided by the pain specialist when dispensing new opioid prescriptions (C)	.515	.002
4. A consistent approach in my practice has helped me feel comfortable in dispensing opioids (C)	.604	.001

Conclusion and Relevance

Most community pharmacists appear to feel confident in dispensing opioid medicines. There is a strong level of confidence among community pharmacists in counseling patients on opioid side effects, overdose, and antidotes. Pharmacists are most comfortable in dispensing opioids when there are management approved dispensing protocols and medical information is provided by the prescribing pain specialist.

References

Pearson AC, Moman RN, Moeschler SM, et.al. Provider confidence in opioid prescribing and chronic pain management: results of the Opioid Therapy Provider Survey. J. Pain Research 2017; 10: 1395-1400.

Disclosures

Authors of this presentation have nothing to disclose concerning possible financial or personal relationships with commercial entities that may have a direct or indirect interest in the subject matter of this presentation.

