



Original Research

Evaluation of a pharmacy service helping patients to get a good start in taking their new medications for chronic diseases

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Abstract

Background: Getting a good start in taking new medications for a chronic disease constitutes a crucial step in the establishment of continuous medical treatment. Patients in this phase report problems such as concerns about their new medication, side effects and practical problems, all contributing to the risk of non-adherence. Counseling at the pharmacy counter may not be structured appropriately to address issues of potential non-adherence to new medication. For these reasons, a new pharmacy service in Denmark was developed. The service consists of a 15-min face-to-face interview and a 10-min telephone follow-up interview.

Purpose: The aim of study was to evaluate the new service with regard to overall patient satisfaction, knowledge, practical problems, a feeling of safety, adherence and concordance.

Methods: Questionnaires were constructed using validated scales for adherence and concordance. Further, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a subset of patients to explore their experiences in more depth. Questionnaires were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 19, and interviews were analyzed using meaning condensation.

Results: Patients reported improved knowledge, feelings of safety and a good start in taking the new medication due to the pharmacy service. The majority of patients reported being adherent, but a potential risk of non-adherence was identified in nearly 50% of patients. Only slight improvements in perceived concordance were reported. The positive outcome of the service was mainly due to the first interview. Some patients had concerns about their new situation, which they thought more important to resolve than issues of potential non-adherence.

Conclusions: Patients were satisfied with the pharmacy service and reported that staff helped them get a good start with the new medication. Challenges were observed regarding the follow-up interview. Some

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patients will also benefit from services more oriented toward resolving their specific medical concerns.
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Introduction

Medication is one of the most widely used therapeutic forms to prevent and alleviate symptoms from chronic diseases. The process of starting to take medication for a chronic disease can be a challenging process for some patients. Having to take medication for the first time for a chronic disease might affect the individual's self-perception regarding seeing oneself as healthy, impose a feeling of loss of control over one's life and additionally pose a threat to established life routines.^{1,2} Moreover, patients report different problems with new medication, due especially to the experience of side effects, concerns about the medication or practical issues. For example, they might find it difficult to swallow tablets or to remember to comply with complicated dosage regimens.³ Additionally, patients receiving new medication have expressed substantial need for more information regarding the medication, including information about side effects, basic usage and drug interactions.^{3–5} Patients' concerns about medications are closely linked to non-initiation, different types of non-adherence during medical treatment, and/or non-persistence of initiated treatments.^{6–8} Hence, getting a good start with taking new medication for a chronic disease constitutes a crucial step in the establishment of adequate continuous medical treatment.

The role of community pharmacies has expanded during recent decades regarding the provision of medical counseling. In several countries, pharmacies or pharmacists are obliged by law to inform patients about appropriate medication use. Some initiatives have been launched to explore the role of community pharmacies in helping newly diagnosed patients overcome the challenges of starting the new medication for a chronic disease.^{3,9} As a result, in England a "New Medicine Service" delivered by community pharmacists has been launched.¹⁰ It consists of either a face-to-face or a telephone interview with a pharmacist 7–14 days after the patient has started the new medical treatment, to explore difficulties the patient is experiencing and give information, advice and reassurance in response to the expressed needs of the patient. Compared to a

control intervention, the service significantly reduced non-adherence as well as problems experienced with new medications.¹⁰

However, in a study exploring how community pharmacies can help patients who recently received antidepressants, Van Geffen et al found that patients were hesitant about giving pharmacies a more profound role in the counseling.¹¹ Patients found that the setting of the pharmacy was inappropriate for receipt of information. Similarly, lack of empathy and professionalism from pharmacy staff was mentioned, as were concerns about receiving contradictory information from different health care professionals. Hence, the role of pharmacies in supporting patients with new medication for chronic conditions is a complex phenomenon deserving more attention.

The aim of this study was to evaluate a new service in Danish community pharmacies intended to help patients get a good start taking a new medication for a chronic disease. Previously in Denmark, several large-scale counseling programs have been tested in community pharmacies and have improved the medication adherence of enrolled patients.^{12,13} The new service was an attempt to integrate adherence support into daily counseling at the pharmacy counter.

Materials and methods

In 2013 in Denmark the new pharmacy service was developed and tested by the Department of Research & Development at Pharmakon – The Danish College of Pharmacy Practice, to explore if the pharmacies' role in supporting patients in starting new medications for chronic diseases could be improved. Danish pharmacy staff is required by law to inform patients about the use of medication. Additionally, the Danish Pharmaceutical Association (pharmacy owners in Denmark) has launched the 'Sector requirements for at-the-counter counseling,' describing in more detail the type of counseling pharmacy patients should receive. The new pharmacy service was an initiative to develop further the daily counseling role of pharmacies with regard to introducing specific counseling tools to support the group of

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