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Commentary

Strategic development of medicines information: Expanding key global initiatives

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Summary

Medicines information (MI) is a broad concept that includes information targeted to health care professionals as well as to patients. It may be in written, electronic or verbal forms. The internet is becoming more widely used as a source for MI, even though research shows that health care professionals and patient information leaflets are still the most common sources for medicine users. As patients are increasingly looking for the information they need themselves, the role of health care professionals in providing information is evolving, and there exists a need for greater health literacy skills among the patients. Medicines information as a concept is often defined and understood differently. Furthermore, it is such an integral part of pharmacy practice that it is rarely discussed as a separate entity. However, there is a growing recognition of a need to discuss MI in a broader sense and consider national strategies to meet consumer needs for medicines information. It also has been recognized that provision of MI should be a shared responsibility of all stakeholders in health care. This commentary gives an example of national level strategic development of MI, and calls for international collaboration.

Keywords: Medicines information; Strategy

Introduction

Medicines information (MI) is paramount in many aspects of pharmacy practice. Its provision is essential to empower patients and to ensure rational and safe use of medicines and adherence to long-term therapies.[1] Patients have a right to information about his or her treatments to enable informed decisions. On the other hand, it can be argued that MI's value is predicated upon patients' acquisition of better treatment outcomes.

Medicines information is a complex and broad topic, and it is often defined and understood differently. Furthermore, it is such an integral part of pharmacy practice that it is rarely discussed as separate entity. Thus, there is a need to analyze MI from a broader perspective (Table 1) than looking merely at what happens at the micro level, e.g., in pharmacies. Key issues to be discussed are how MI should be defined, of what does it consist, and most importantly, how it

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Table 1
Examples of stakeholders on medicines information on a global, national and local level

Stakeholder group	Examples of types of medicines information
Global level	
FDA	Legislation, requirements, guidelines
European Union, European Medicines Agency	
WHO	Recommendations, guidelines
	Education
FIP	Recommendations, guidelines
	Education
Global drug industry	Drug industry activities
Open Internet content	Wikipedia etc.
National level	
MOH and regulatory agencies	National legislation, requirements, controls
Professional organizations	Leaflets
Educational institutions	Printed materials
	Electronic media, databases
	DI centers
Drug industry	Leaflets
	Printed materials
	Electronic media, databases
Local level	
Pharmacies	Counseling
	Material provision
Health establishments (health care centers, hospitals, wards etc.)	Counseling
	Material provision

can be facilitated in such a way to optimize treatment outcomes and empower medicine users.

What is medicines information?

Medicines information is a wide concept including information targeted to health care professionals as well as to patients. It may be in written, electronic or verbal forms.[2] It includes, for example, development of MI materials, use of MI databases and information systems in day-to-day practice by professionals, work of Drug Information Centres, patient counseling, MI materials targeted to patients, and so on. It should be noted that patients may see MI differently from professionals, and for example, consider social media discussion forums and advice from their peers and neighbors as sources of MI.

Medicines information may be understood as a *process* of providing information on the safe and effective use of pharmaceuticals or transferring knowledge about medicines to optimize therapeutics for the benefit of patients and of society.[3] On the other hand, *content* of MI can be defined as is done in regulations on approved medicinal products for patient information leaflets (Table 2).[4] Furthermore, the content of oral MI has been described in medication counseling guidelines; however, there is no consensus of what a good medication counseling should include. The most well-known and only validated medication counseling resource is

Table 2
Content of medicines information in patient information leaflets in the European Union[4]

Content
Information on the identification of the medicinal product (e.g., name, strength, and pharmaceutical name)
Therapeutic indications
Information that is necessary before the medicinal product is taken (the contraindications, appropriate precautions for use, interactions, and special warnings
Instructions for proper use (dosage, route, and frequency of administration)
Information where the medicinal product is authorized