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Original Research

# Understanding community pharmacy intervention practice: Lessons from intervention researchers

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## Abstract

**Background:** Community pharmacy (CP) is a setting with health promotion and public health potential which could include strategies with a nutrition promotion focus. Research embedded in this setting has explored and produced evidence to inform practice change to develop this potential. The experience of undertaking research in this setting may provide insight into the challenges and key features of intervention research practice. Exploring experience-based knowledge presents as a productive area of research, extending what can be known beyond the bounds of what is measurable.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to understand the experience of intervention research in CP with a focus on nutrition and to develop guidance for future research practice (intervention design and implementation) in CP based on interventionists' reflections and practice wisdom.

**Methods:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 9 researchers with experience in undertaking intervention research in CP with a nutrition component. Content analysis, constant comparison and interpretive description were used in the analysis and interpretation of interview data.

**Results:** Five key lessons were identified – 1) utilize existing capacity; 2) navigate and utilize social power and interests; 3) personalize engagement and recruitment; 4) consider the logistics and 5) intervention type considerations. Key challenges for translating research into practice and sustaining change included financial sustainability, physical constraints, logistics, collaboration, and practice change enablers. Personal reflections on research practice identified qualities, such as determination and skills in networking, as key for researching in CP.

**Conclusions:** CP-embedded research is challenging given the complexity of the practice environment. The social context of CP appears central to intervention research and a nuanced understanding of the social context needs to be the basis for intervention design to inform successful implementation. Experience-based and insider knowledge is useful and needed for nuanced design and development of intervention research in CP.

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**Keywords:** Lessons learned; Community pharmacy; Experience-based knowledge; Social context; Intervention

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## Introduction

The development of the public health/health promotion agenda in community pharmacy has led to the expansion of intervention research in this setting investigating various aspects of practice and areas for practice enhancement and change, of benefit for the professionalization of pharmacy as well as for customers and the wider community.<sup>1,2</sup> The development and translation of knowledge is important for the enhancement of health settings and services; however, the transferability of research findings into practice appears difficult and poorly translated.<sup>3,4</sup> Dissemination of research findings through journal publication predominantly emphasizes technical knowledge and research designs valued as providing the most robust evidence tend to decontextualize knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Given the limitations of text and practical challenges of describing intervention studies within the confines of journal limits, it is likely that there may be additional knowledge available not readily accessible in current forms of evidence dissemination.

Research is, as with other professional practices, underpinned by the use of different types of knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Emphasis on technical knowledge in much scientific literature does not account for or value other types of knowledge used in professional practice. Technical knowledge cannot account for ways that experienced professionals practice compared with the novice.<sup>6</sup> Experiential knowledge; i.e., that which has developed through experience, thinking and reflecting,<sup>7</sup> presents as an important source for gaining further understanding of intervention research. Dunne (1999) amongst others suggests that practical judgment is a key type of knowledge used in professional practice<sup>5</sup> and builds on experience-based knowledge, learning from experience and then reconstructing practice based on that experience.<sup>5,8</sup> This process requires that one is open to learning within the context of practice.<sup>5,9</sup> This study recognizes the constraints of the peer-review process in terms of intelligence dissemination – intelligence being broader than evidence. Hughes and Margetts (2010) define intelligence as ‘information from multiple sources and methods that helps inform effective intervention strategy design decision making.’<sup>10</sup> As such, it is expected that there may be untapped experiential knowledge developed by persons planning, implementing and evaluating interventions in the community

pharmacy setting. Gaining insight into the experiences of interventionists is an important intelligence gathering process.

Researching lessons learned, based on knowledge management, suggests that the process of harvesting and sharing collective knowledge can be important for progressing practice and improving decision making.<sup>11</sup> Patton (2001) suggests investigating lessons learned, and harnessing and understanding experiential knowledge, may be important in generating new knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Lessons learned research looks to investigate accumulated wisdom that is compared across contexts and extrapolated to form a type of cumulative knowledge.<sup>11</sup> It also can contribute to implementation theory, or help us understand the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of program delivery.<sup>11</sup> The role of this type of knowledge can inform design of future programs and even contribute to policy and practice changes. This is of particular interest in the context of intervention research in community settings which is characterized by complexity.<sup>12</sup>

Research based in community pharmacy (CP) has been undertaken to demonstrate the utility of pharmacists in providing extended services beyond prescriptions and dispensing.<sup>1</sup> Research situating CP as a health service setting with a role in health promotion has demonstrated the utility of CP in providing various health care services, such as quit smoking and risk factor assessment for cardiovascular disease.<sup>2</sup> A number of studies have included nutrition related strategy components in pharmacy however there may be potential to develop this further. Given research in community pharmacy has grown, there is opportunity to learn lessons from interventionists (researchers undertaking practice embedded research in CP). It is evident that research in community settings has a certain level of complexity not readily explained or reported on in published literature.<sup>12</sup> It is assumed that interventionists have developed practical knowledge of community pharmacy from the research perspective and have developed an understanding of the challenges of implementing research into a practice environment. As such, this study aimed to understand the experience of intervention research in community pharmacy, to clarify the nutrition related strategy components of their studies and to develop guidance for future research practice (intervention design and implementation) in CP based on interventionists’ reflections and practice wisdom.

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