

Preventing and resolving drug therapy problems by understanding patients' medication experiences

Djenane Ramalho-de Oliveira, Sarah J. Shoemaker, Molly Ekstrand, and Mateus R. Alves

Abstract

Objectives: To provide tools for pharmacists to uncover patients' medication experiences and to discuss strategies that medication therapy management (MTM) pharmacists use to prevent and resolve drug therapy problems rooted in patients' medication experiences.

Design: Qualitative study.

Setting: Health care delivery system in the Minneapolis/Saint Paul, MN, area from January to October 2010.

Participants: 10 MTM pharmacists.

Intervention: Thematic analysis of data from a focus group of MTM pharmacists and an MTM pharmacist's practice diary.

Results: Patients' medication experiences were revealed as a foundational aspect of MTM pharmacists' daily practices because they had to take these experiences into consideration to be effective practitioners. According to MTM pharmacists, patients express attitudes toward drug therapy in many different ways, thereby affecting how each patient takes his/her medications. Patients' medication experiences often were at the root of drug therapy problems (DTPs). From MTM pharmacists' examples, we identified DTPs at the root of patients' medication experiences and several strategies used by pharmacists to address patients' needs and concerns regarding medications. MTM pharmacists approached patients in a nonjudgmental way so that patients would feel comfortable sharing their perspectives and goals. After understanding patients' motivations and the basis of their attitudes and decision making, pharmacists could negotiate the process of behavioral change, if needed.

Conclusion: If pharmacists understand patients' medication experiences, they may be able to address and resolve DTPs to ultimately improve therapeutic outcomes and reduce adverse events.

Keywords: Medication experiences, medication therapy management, drug therapy problems.

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It is well accepted within the pharmacy profession that the focus of the pharmacist is changing from the drug product to the patient.¹⁻⁴ This means that pharmacists are expected to incorporate the perspectives and needs of patients into their clinical judgment and decision-making processes.^{5,6} Considering patients' perspectives entails seeing them as unique individuals, not only in terms of understanding how they experience their medical conditions but also uncovering their values, desires, and fears associated with their care and treatment.^{3,5,7}

In the current health care system, pharmacists are increasingly expected to become more engaged in providing direct care to patients. The patient-centered medical home acknowledges the essential role that pharmacists can play in improving clinical outcomes and decreasing health care costs.^{8,9} The clinical work of pharmacists has been officially recognized by the federal government since 2003,¹⁰ requiring Medicare Part D plans to establish medication therapy management (MTM) programs for eligible beneficiaries as part of their benefits. According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, MTM programs should be designed to ensure that covered Part D drugs are used to optimize therapeutic outcomes through improved medication use and to reduce the risk of adverse events, including adverse drug interactions, for targeted beneficiaries.¹⁰ In the pharmacy associations' consensus definition, MTM is described as a service or distinct group of services that optimize therapeutic outcomes for individual patients.^{2,4} MTM is a

reimbursable service that allows pharmacists to deliver pharmaceutical care to patients using a systematic review process designed to identify and resolve drug therapy problems (DTPs) and promote optimal patient outcomes.¹¹ Moreover, Medicaid programs in several states throughout the country reimburse pharmacists to provide MTM to eligible patients.¹²⁻¹⁴ However, of note, currently not every payer reimburses pharmacists for MTM services.

Within pharmaceutical care practice,^{9,15-18} MTM is defined as a patient-centered service in which pharmacists work with patients to understand their perspectives, needs, and concerns regarding medications. To be effective, besides using evidence-based medicine, pharmacists also must use knowledge that incorporates the subjectivity of patients and the meanings they assign to their conditions and medications. This type of knowledge has been discussed extensively by numerous authors from different disciplines and can be thought of as attending to patients' lifeworlds,^{19,20} narrative medicine,²¹⁻²⁴ medication narratives,²⁵ and patients' illness and medication experiences.^{26,27}

Shoemaker and Ramalho de Oliveira²⁷ argued for the importance of pharmacists attending to "the medication experience" in order to understand patients' decision-making processes and medication-taking behaviors. The medication experience includes patients' past experiences, expectations, feelings, and concerns regarding medications and is expected to influence their attitudes and behaviors. Shoemaker and Ramalho de Oliveira previously defined the medication experience as "an individual's subjective experience of taking a medication in his daily life. It begins as an encounter with a chronic medication. It is an encounter that is given meaning before it happens and is often a reaction to the symbol that medication holds. The experience may include positive or negative bodily effects. The unremitting nature of a chronic medication often causes an individual to question the need for the medication. Subsequently, the individual may exert control by altering the way he takes the medication and often in part because of the gained expertise with the medication in his own body."²⁷

In their study, the following medication experience themes were identified:

- The meaningful encounter with a new medication, which can be revealed as a sense of losing control, be a sign of getting older, cause questioning, and be associated with stigma.
- Bodily effects: Medications have expected pharmacological benefits and anticipated and unanticipated adverse events, all of which are experienced by patients.
- The unremitting nature of a chronic medication, like a chronic condition, is experienced as a burden by the patient.
- Exerting control: Patients may exert control over their medications after they have acquired the knowledge and skills to manage them.

Moreover, extensive literature discusses the meaning of medications for patients, focusing on specific diseases²⁸⁻³⁰ and medication classes.³¹⁻³⁴

In this article, we aim to go beyond the existing knowledge

At a Glance

Synopsis: Thematic analysis of data from a focus group of medication therapy management (MTM) pharmacists and one MTM pharmacist's practice diary revealed the important effect of patients' medication experiences on clinical decision making. Patients' medication experiences often were at the root of drug therapy problems. Several strategies for addressing patients' needs and concerns regarding medications were identified, including using a nonjudgmental approach that allows patients to share their perspectives and goals, thereby empowering them to implement change.

Analysis: Medication experiences are embedded in patients' narratives and revealed as they express needs and concerns. These experiences involve both negative and positive aspects and often are influenced by the experiences of family members and loved ones. Patients' social understanding of a condition or the symbolism associated with a certain medication or medical condition can influence their medication experiences. In addition to being substances with chemical and curative properties, medications have social lives or meanings that communities and people attribute to them. The authors recommend introducing coursework regarding the medication experience into the doctor of pharmacy curriculum.

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