



## Communication study

## Patient–provider interaction during medication encounters: A study in outpatient pharmacies in the Netherlands



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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To describe communication between pharmacy staff and patients at the counter in outpatient pharmacies. Both content and communication style were investigated.

**Methods:** Pharmaceutical encounters in three outpatient pharmacies in the Netherlands were video-recorded. Videos were analyzed based on an observation protocol for the following information: content of encounter, initiator of a theme and pharmacy staff's communication style.

**Results:** In total, 119 encounters were recorded which concerned 42 first prescriptions, 16 first refill prescriptions and 61 follow-up refill prescriptions. During all encounters, discussion was mostly initiated by pharmacy staff (85%). In first prescription encounters topics most frequently discussed included instructions for use (83%) and dosage instructions (95%). In first refill encounters, patient experiences such as adverse effects (44%) and beneficial effects (38%) were regularly discussed in contrast to follow-up refills (7% and 5%). Patients' opinion on medication was hardly discussed.

**Conclusion:** Pharmacy staff in outpatient pharmacies generally provide practical information, less frequently they discuss patients' experiences and seldom discuss patients' perceptions and preferences about prescribed medication.

**Practice implications:** This study shows there is room for improvement, as communication is still not according to professional guidelines. To implement professional guidelines successfully, it is necessary to identify underlying reasons for not following the guidelines.

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## 1. Introduction

Medication counselling is an essential part of pharmaceutical care [1], especially in first dispensing and first refills. At the pharmacy counter pharmacy staff has ample opportunity to inform patients about their medication and support them in using their medication properly [2–4]. Effective communication between providers and patients about medication use is associated with

patients' satisfaction, recall of information and eventually their health status [4–7]. Research shows that patients who are sufficiently informed about the risks and benefits of their treatment, show higher adherence to their prescribed medical treatment [6–12]. For communication to be effective, both the healthcare provider and the patient should actively engage in these medical encounters. Healthcare providers should counsel patients to enable informed decisions and inform patients how to properly use the medication. Patients should express perceived side effects and their beliefs and concerns. This results in an effective and efficient patient-centered encounter in which a patient perceives support and care [13–15].

The Royal Dutch Pharmacists Association has issued guidelines on pharmaceutical care, amongst which guidelines about the

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**Table 1**  
Characteristics of the study participants ( $n=119$ ).

	% (n)
Male gender	41.2 (49)
Age ( $n=70$ )	
18–34	20.0 (14)
35–54	30.0 (21)
55–64	18.6 (13)
65–74	22.9 (16)
$\geq 75$	8.6 (6)
Number of medicines per participant	
1	60.5 (72)
2	23.5 (28)
$\geq 3$	16.0 (19)
Status of encounters	
First prescription encounters	35.3 (42)
First refill prescription encounters	13.4 (16)
Refill prescription encounters	51.3 (61)

different kinds of prescription drug dispensing contacts (available from [www.knmp.nl](http://www.knmp.nl), consulted November 27th 2014). In case of dispensing a new prescribed drug, pharmacy staff – including pharmacy technicians and pharmacists – have to explain patients what they may expect from the prescribed drug. Information is to be given about the drug activity, side-effects, possible interactions with other drugs and drug instructions. In case of delivering a first refill prescription, pharmacy staff above all ask patients about their drug experiences. In addition, they provide the same information as given in case of a new prescribed drug. In case of follow-up refills, pharmacy staff ask patients about their drug experiences and be attentive for any new questions, whereas they also pay attention to drug adherence.

Traditionally, pharmacies in the Netherlands were divided into hospital and community pharmacies. In 2001, a new connection

between these two types of pharmacies was introduced because of the need for good pharmaceutical care for patients discharged from the hospital: the outpatient pharmacy [16,17]. Outpatient pharmacies are located in a hospital or clinic and dispense medication to patients discharged from the hospital and patients in outpatient therapy. In 2012, about two third of all Dutch hospitals had an outpatient pharmacy [17,18]. The outpatient pharmacy was expected to improve quality of care because of collaboration of pharmacy staff with medical specialists in the hospital as well as with general practitioners in the primary care setting. In outpatient pharmacies, the majority of prescriptions concern first dispenses in contrast to the dispenses in the community pharmacy, therefore medication counseling during (first) prescription encounters in outpatient pharmacies might be better or different [17].

However, there is limited research on patient–provider communication in outpatient pharmacies and whether it is in line with guidelines. The aim of this study was to describe both the content and the communication style during encounters between pharmacy staff and patients about prescribed medication in outpatient pharmacies.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Design and setting

We conducted an observational study in three outpatient pharmacies in the Netherlands. The study protocol was approved by the UPPER (Utrecht Pharmacy Practice Research network for Education and Research) Institutional Review Board of the division of Pharmacoepidemiology and Clinical Pharmacology, Utrecht University. Four outpatient pharmacies were invited to participate in the study, three agreed to participate. These pharmacies were specifically approached based on their interest in (research)

**Table 2a**  
Discussed themes of the MEDICODE during first prescription encounters in the pharmacies and the initiator of the discussion ( $n=42$ ).

	First prescriptions (%)	% Pharmacy technician	% Patient
(1) <i>General information about the drug</i>			
Medication named	59.5 (25)	96.0 (24)	4.0 (1)
Class named	40.5 (17)	100.0 (17)	0.0 (0)
Patient asks pharmacy technician questions about medication	35.7 (15)	0.0 (0)	100.0 (15)
Concerns regarding medication	11.9 (5)	20.0 (1)	80.0 (4)
Patient receives other medication (e.g. other generic)	4.8 (2)	0.0 (0)	100.0 (2)
Strength of medication	4.8 (2)	100.0 (2)	0.0 (0)
Pharmacy technician asks patient's opinion of medication	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Objections regarding medication	2.4 (1)	0.0 (0)	100.0 (1)
Doubt about effect of the medication	4.8 (2)	0.0 (0)	100.0 (2)
(2) <i>Explanation of prescription</i>			
Instructions for medication (dosage)	95.2 (40)	97.5 (39)	2.5 (1)
Medication-usage issues	83.3 (35)	94.3 (33)	5.7 (2)
Form of medication	73.8 (31)	100.0 (31)	0.0 (0)
Reasons for taking medication	57.1 (24)	91.7 (22)	8.3 (2)
Duration of treatment	26.2 (11)	100.0 (11)	0.0 (0)
Costs of medication	23.8 (10)	70.0 (7)	30.0 (3)
Adjustment of dosage	19.1 (8)	100.0 (8)	0.0 (0)
Conditions for not taking medication	7.1 (3)	100.0 (3)	0.0 (0)
Pharmacy technician questions compliance with medication	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Compliance problems	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Solutions for compliance	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Consequences of non-compliance	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
(3) <i>Additional information about the drug</i>			
Mechanism of action of medication	59.5 (25)	100.0 (25)	0.0 (0)
Possible adverse effects of medication	52.4 (22)	95.5 (21)	4.5 (1)
Expected effect on symptoms	21.4 (9)	100.0 (9)	0.0 (0)
Timeframe for expected effect	21.4 (9)	100.0 (9)	0.0 (0)
Pharmacy technician asks about allergies/intolerance to the medication	16.7 (7)	100.0 (7)	0.0 (0)
Drug interactions	9.5 (4)	100.0 (4)	0.0 (0)
Contraindications of medication	7.1 (3)	100.0 (3)	0.0 (0)

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