Experiences in Teaching and Learning

"How do I say that?": Using communication principles to enhance medication therapy management instruction

Paul M. Denvir[a], Katie E. Cardone[b,*], Wendy M. Parker[a], Jennifer Cerulli[b]

[a] Department of Population Health Sciences, Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, 106 New Scotland Ave, Albany, NY 12208, United States
[b] Department of Pharmacy Practice, Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, 106 New Scotland Ave, Albany, NY 12208, United States

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Background and purpose: Medication therapy management (MTM) is a comprehensive, patient-centered approach to improving medication use, reducing the risk of adverse events and improving medication adherence. Given the service delivery model and required outputs of MTM services, communication skills are of utmost importance. The objectives of this study were to identify and describe communication principles and instructional practices to enhance MTM training.

Educational activity and setting: Drawing on formative assessment data from interviews of both pharmacy educators and alumni, this article identifies and describes communication principles and instructional practices that pharmacy educators can use to enhance MTM training initiatives to develop student communication strategies.

Findings: Analysis revealed five key communication challenges of MTM service delivery, two communication principles that pharmacy teachers and learners can use to address those challenges, and a range of specific strategies, derived from communication principles, that students can use when challenges emerge. Implications of the analysis for pharmacy educators and researchers are described.

Summary: Proactive communication training provided during MTM advanced pharmacy practice experiences enabled students to apply the principles and instructional strategies to specific patient interactions during the advanced pharmacy practice experiences and in their post-graduation practice settings.

Background and purpose

The Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 included a mandate for the provision of medication therapy management (MTM) services to high-risk Medicare beneficiaries with Part D prescription drug coverage.[1] MTM is a patient-centric and comprehensive approach to improve medication use, reduce the risk of adverse events and improve medication adherence.[1,2] The cornerstone of MTM is the comprehensive medication review (CMR), defined as an interactive, person-to-person or telehealth medication review (including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, herbal therapies, and dietary supplements) performed in real-time by a pharmacist or other qualified provider.[2,3] A written summary of the medication review is provided to the patient in the form of a personal medication list and a medication action plan (MAP). Following the CMR, pertinent findings are communicated to

prescribers, often in written form.[2,3]

Given the service delivery model and required outputs of MTM services, communication skills are of utmost importance. Not only must the MTM provider effectively communicate with patients and/or caregivers, but also with prescribers, other health professionals and colleagues. Both the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education Standards 2016[4] and the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy's Center for the Advancement of Pharmacy Education (CAPE) Educational Outcomes[5] cite the importance of effective communication. Communication skills, health literacy assessment, interprofessional teamwork, audience-adapted communication and cultural sensitivity are identified as necessary skills to meet these competences, which are foundational to the delivery of MTM services.[4,5]

Rationale and objectives

The MyMedZ Medication Management Service at Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences began in April 2011 when opportunities for provision of MTM services began to emerge in the region. At that time, students, preceptors, and faculty were not routinely providing MTM, leading to MTM payers having unmet needs for providers in the region. Thus, the MyMedZ Service emerged to meet both the unmet provider need and unmet training need, serving as an on campus "laboratory" for the training of future practitioners. In the clinic, students shadowed the preceptors for several encounters (recruitment, comprehensive medication reviews CMR), then engaged in provision of MTM services with direct pharmacist supervision. Patients were referred by third party payers via electronic MTM platforms that were used to provide, document and bill for services. Patients were not familiar with the college service at the outset. Approximately 95% of services were provided telephonically. From 2011 to 2015, the service grew from providing 120 CMRs and 170 targeted medication reviews (TMRs) to almost 200 CMRs and 324 TMRs annually, with a patient CMR acceptance rate of over 30%.

The MyMedZ service promotes MTM services through patient care, teaching, service, and scholarship. A goal of the practice is to provide quality MTM services while educating student pharmacists to deliver patient care using the MTM framework. Two years after establishing MTM-focused advanced pharmacy practice experiences (APPEs) within the service, two pharmacy practice faculty sought to conduct a formative assessment of the MTM training experience. Whereas summative assessment emphasizes measurement of learning outcomes to determine the effectiveness of an educational intervention, formative assessment is typically used to explore teachers' and learners' emerging understandings and perspectives and to inform future interventions.[6]

In standard course evaluations of our MTM experiences, students' Likert scale and open-ended responses indicated that the APPEs were seen as valuable and professionally satisfying (data available upon request). Open-ended comments specifically highlighted the value of communication skills training, with particular emphasis on opportunities for patient interaction. The pharmacy practice faculty preceptors believed that the standard APPE evaluation tools did not adequately address oral and written communication-based competencies that were present in eleven of the experience's sixteen educational objectives (Table 1) and wished to further explore the teaching and learning of MTM communication skills. Previous literature of MTM service delivery during APPEs has not specifically focused on communication skills and used student survey methods to assess their perceived achievement of educational outcomes.[7,8] This pilot study assesses communication skill development in a different way. An interdisciplinary collaboration emerged between the pharmacy practice faculty, a health communication scholar, and a medical sociologist to complete this formative assessment. Institutional review board approval was obtained.

The primary purpose of this article is to identify and describe communication concepts and instructional approaches that may be used to enhance MTM training initiatives. The specific objectives of this article are to draw on both faculty and student perspectives to describe the following: (1) communication challenges encountered during MTM service delivery; (2) communication principles

Table 1
Medication therapy management (MTM) APPE communication-focused course objectives.

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1. Identify and describe the components of a comprehensive medication review (CMR) as defined by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Core Elements of MTM Version 2.0. (*Remembering*[a])
2. Describe the features and benefits of MTM services to various stakeholders (e.g., patients, prescribers). (Understanding)
3. Prepare for a CMR with a patient by conducting a preliminary review of prescription medication claims and diagnoses to identify potential medication-related problems. (*Applying*)
4. Collect patient specific information during a CMR with a patient (either live or telephonically) including identifying the patient chief compliant, conducting a medical history and gathering medication information. (*Understanding*)
5. Assess medication therapies to identify and prioritize medication related problems (MRPs) utilizing primary literature and print/electronic references. (Analyzing)
6. Improve patients' knowledge of their prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, herbal therapies and dietary supplements, identify and address problems or concerns that patients may have, and empower patients to self-manage their medications and their health condition. (*Understanding*)
7. Effectively verbally communicate the potential MRPs and recommendations to the patient. (*Applying*)
8. Create a personal medication record for the patient using either the web-based MTM platforms. (*Applying*)
9. Effectively communicate in writing to the patient via a Medication Action Plan a plan to resolve MRPs and address patient concerns using patient friendly language. (*Applying*)
10. Verbally communicate potential MRP and recommendations to the physician office as needed. (*Applying*)
11. Prioritize and communicate the potential MRPs and recommendations to the physician via a written SOAP note. (*Evaluating, Creating*)

CMR (comprehensive medication review); CMS (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services); MTM (Medication Therapy Management); MRP (medication-related problem); SOAP (subjective, objective, assessment, plan).
  [a] Bloom's taxonomy level.