

Training courses for pharmacists

Starting point

Pharmacists are trained to advise their clients about the choice and application of different medication. Generally one has to differentiate between prescription drugs (e.g. anti-depressants) and non-prescription drugs (e.g. St John's Wort). Pharmacists advise their clients about application, duration and side effects of a drug course. A big part of a pharmacy's turnover is achieved by non-prescription medications, dietary supplements, regimens and treatments at health resorts. St John's Wort is still the most frequently bought medication to treat depression in Germany. However, outside of Germany St John's Wort is not very popular. The quality and length of a consultation depends on the individual pharmacy. Some pharmacies have prepared consultation areas where pharmacists can offer a personal consultation with their clients.

Pharmacies are important point of information. News about current medication, talks about health issues and health checks are offered to the clients and pharmacy journals keep the patients informed about current health issues.

Known deficits

Pharmacists are normally NOT able to detect a depression that requires treatment if a patient enters the pharmacy. They are not trained to apply the diagnostic criteria to differentiate between sadness and depression. Most of the time pharmacists are not trained on counselling skills either and find it stressful to deal with obviously seriously ill clients. Pharmacists have to overcome their own inhibitions when dealing with people with psychological disorders. Whilst patients with physical illnesses usually receive detailed and extensive information about the drugs that they have been prescribed, this is not the case with psychotherapeutic drugs and psychologically ill patients. Pharmacists are often overstrained with the situation and do not realise how important it would be for the patient to receive detailed information on the medication, how they work and what effects to expect (latency of effect, side effects during the first few days, etc.). When people ask for St. John's Wort pharmacists usually do not mention that the customer should see a doctor for further advice, too. Pharmacists are able to play a very crucial role in encouraging patients to look for medical help during the early stages of a psychological disorder.

Aims of the training course

Pharmacists should learn to diagnose and to differentiate between depression and emotional upset. Advantages and disadvantages of the different medication should be addressed. The compliance of patients is the most important factor in making the therapy successful. Thus pharmacist should be aware of their importance in encouraging the compliance when giving out the information about the medication to the customers. Pharmacists should receive a list of local

contacts where they can refer customers to. Pharmacies can become information points for depression by distributing flyers and pamphlets on the subject.

Practical advice

Training courses for pharmacists can only take place after working hours during the week (many pharmacies are open until later at night) or at the weekend. This means that pharmacists can only take part in those courses in their own free time. Nevertheless the level of interest in these courses is pretty high. Our experience has shown that duration of 1.5 – 2 hours for the workshop is sufficient. We recommend that you are short and precise about the key symptoms of depression and focus on the differentiation between depression and emotional upset. The subject of suicidality can be addressed briefly. More attention should be devoted to the conversation between pharmacist and patients. Role-plays and demonstrations are recommended.