



PGEU PHARMACY FACTSHEET NO 5: COMMUNITY PHARMACISTS & PUBLIC HEALTH – Did you know?

The PGEU reception and exhibition “*Community Pharmacists in Europe – a Resource for Public Health*” highlighted the important contribution that community pharmacists make to public health through a variety of pharmaceutical care programmes, health information and health promotion campaigns and data collection activities.

Many people are not aware of the extent of the public health activities of community pharmacists, a selection of which are highlighted below. **Did you know?**

Community Pharmacists and Chronic Diseases

Cardiovascular Disease

Did you know that community pharmacists collaborate with doctors in order to detect early warning signs for cardiovascular diseases? For example in Austria pharmacists measure blood pressure, cholesterol levels, weight and blood sugar levels to detect risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

Cardiovascular disease is the No. 1 cause of death in the developed world.

Diabetes

Did you know that community pharmacists are involved in the treatment of diabetes? For example, in Norway and Portugal pharmacists offer health monitoring to detect risk factors for diabetes and run pharmaceutical care programmes for people with diabetes.

In Portugal, systematic review of diabetes care programmes shows positive results including improvements in key clinical parameters for patients enrolled in the programme and cost savings for the healthcare system.

If risk factors for diabetes are detected early enough, lifestyle changes alone can sometimes reverse the onset of the condition and avoid the need for insulin treatment.

Asthma

Did you know that community pharmacists undertake pharmaceutical care programmes for asthma sufferers? For example in Finland and the Czech republic pharmacists undertake routine follow-up of asthma patients, check medication usage and give advice on managing their condition.

The WHO report that asthma affects 100-150 million people in the world and the proportion of the population suffering from asthma is increasing by 50% a decade. Although there is as yet no cure for asthma, the condition can be managed with a combination of medication and environmental control.

Hypertension

Did you know that community pharmacists offer blood-pressure monitoring services to patients? For example patients in Austria, Latvia and Slovenia showing signs of hypertension are provided with advice on lifestyle changes and when necessary are referred to their physician.

High blood pressure can often be reduced through simple lifestyle changes such as reducing salt and fat intake, not smoking, undertaking regular exercise and only consuming moderate amounts of alcohol.

Community Pharmacists and Healthcare Spending

Medicines Budgets

Did you know that community pharmacists collect data on medicines use? For example in Italy an advanced system of data collection for reimbursed medicines involves over 90% of Italian pharmacies. The data goes to the Italian Ministry of Health, which is able to use the information to track and analyse trends in medicines use and the effects these trends have on pharmaceutical budgets.

Due to demographic and social changes, governments across Europe are facing rising healthcare costs and declining tax and social security revenues. As a result pharmaceutical budgets are often subject to cost reduction measures. Accurate data on medicines consumption helps governments to predict and analyse the effect of different targeted cost reduction measures.

Generic Medicines

Did you know that community pharmacists have been involved in campaigns to explain and promote generic medicines to citizens? In France and Belgium, community pharmacists have worked hard to promote the message that generics medicines are safe and reliable in order to help to increase the use of generics.

Increasing the use of generic medicines is an important instrument for governments to reduce their medicines spending.

Treatment of Minor Ailments

Did you know that community pharmacists take an active role in primary health care through the treatment of minor ailments? In the UK and Sweden, schemes to encourage citizens to ask their pharmacist about minor ailments have been very successful reducing the burden on overworked general practitioners and helping to avoid misuse of non-prescription medicines.

Responsible self-medication can empower citizens to take responsibility for their own health when it comes to minor ailments and reduces unnecessary GP visits, thus making cost savings for the healthcare system.

Community Pharmacists, Rational Use of Medicines, Patient Compliance and Safety

Rational Use of Medicines

Did you know that community pharmacists practise pharmaceutical intervention to verify that medicines are being correctly used and also to educate citizens on their rational use? For example, in Greece, community pharmacists have developed a model of pharmaceutical intervention to promote the rational use of prescription medicines and responsible self-medication

Patient Compliance

Did you know that community pharmacists work hard to assist patients to understand and correctly follow their medication regimes? For example, in Croatia, the Czech Republic and Ireland, community pharmacists have run an “ask about your medicines” campaign to encourage patients to ask important questions about their medicines to improve patient compliance.

A recent WHO report¹ calculated that compliance for patients with chronic diseases is only 50% in developed countries. The cost of non-compliance can be calculated both in terms of generating additional costs for healthcare systems due to misuse or non-use of medicines leading to further

¹ “Adherence to long term therapies – evidence for action” Report of World Health Organisation, April 2003

treatment or even hospitalisation, and by simply wasting resources through the non-use of prescribed medicines funded by healthcare systems.

Medication Errors and Patient Safety

Did you know that community pharmacists work to improve patient safety by reducing medication errors through routine intervention to verify patient's medication? In Denmark and Germany sophisticated models of pharmaceutical intervention and medication profiling of patients have been successful in reducing medication errors.

Many unnecessary hospitalisations are caused by medication errors and lead to extra costs for healthcare systems as well as negative consequences for the health of the patients concerned. Studies in the USA calculate that the cost of hospital admissions as a result of medication related morbidity and mortality was \$121.5 billion in 2000².

Community Pharmacists and Healthy Living

Healthy Eating

Did you know that community pharmacists offer advice on healthy eating and losing weight? For example, citizens in Germany can turn to their community pharmacist for personalised advice on how to eat more healthily and how to lose weight sensibly.

Obesity related illness and medical complications resulting from obesity are fast becoming huge drains on resources for European healthcare systems. For example, research into the cost burden of obesity in Scotland conducted by Glasgow University calculates that obesity is costing the Scottish health service as much as smoking related diseases³.

Smoking cessation

Did you know that Community pharmacists run health promotion campaigns on the dangers of tobacco? For instance in Cyprus and Italy pharmacists cooperate with health authorities to warn citizens of the dangers of smoking and provide practical advice to encourage smokers to kick the habit.

Smoking related diseases place a huge burden on healthcare systems across Europe because smokers suffer higher rates of cancer, and smoking is a risk factor for many diseases including hypertension, asthma and coronary heart disease. According to the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Consumer Protection "*Tobacco is the single largest cause of avoidable death in the European Union*"⁴.

HIV/AIDS

Did you know that community pharmacists are involved in the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS? For example in Spain pharmacists take part in health information campaigns to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS and provide accurate information on the disease and its transmission.

There is as yet no cure for HIV/AIDS, although modern medicine can now manage the disease in many patients. Preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS is therefore of vital importance for public health.

Safe Sun

Did you know that community pharmacists are active raising awareness of the dangers of sun-exposure to the skin? For example, in France and Spain, community pharmacists participate in annual information campaigns advising citizens on how best to protect their skin from the sun.

² Erns, Frank R & Grizzle, Amy J, "*Drug related morbidity and Mortality: Updating the cost-of-illness model*" Journal of the American Pharmaceutical Association, vol. 41, issue 2, 2001

³ "*Scots obesity bill tops £170 million*" BBC News on-line, 11 June 2003

⁴ http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_determinants/life_style/Tobacco/tobacco_en.htm

Over-exposure to the sun is a key factor in the development of skin cancer. Choosing and properly using appropriate sun-protection products can reduce the risk considerably.

Community Pharmacists and Targeted Assistance to Patients

Senior Citizens

Did you know that community pharmacists provide special assistance to elderly patients to improve compliance with medication regimes? For example, in Denmark the “Elderly service programme” involves community pharmacists providing individual elderly patients with counselling and regular reviews of their medication to identify actual and potential drug related problems.

Demographic changes across Europe are resulting in an increasingly elderly population that is living longer than ever before. The older people get, the more health problems they tend to suffer which can lead to them taking several different kinds of medication. Targeted support for elderly patients to assist them to understand and correctly take their medicines can reduce the need for further treatment and improve their quality of life.

Medicines and Driving

Did you know that community pharmacists in the Netherlands have undertaken public information campaigns to inform citizens who drive of the dangers of driving while taking certain kinds of medication?

Many medicines including prescribed medication and some common non-prescription medicines can impair driving ability and even be a factor in road traffic accidents.

Drug Users

Did you know that community pharmacists play an important role in helping people to manage and eventually kick their drug addiction? For example, pharmacists in Portugal and the UK provide methadone treatment for heroin addicts and run needle exchange programmes.

Other Public Health Activities of Community Pharmacists

Contraception

Did you know that community pharmacists participate in health information campaigns on emergency contraception and offer contraceptive advice? For example, community pharmacists in France and the United Kingdom provide advice on and access to emergency hormonal contraception and pharmacists in Turkey undertake special training in counselling citizens on contraception.

Community Pharmacists and Vaccinations:

Did you know that community pharmacists participate in health promotion campaigns to encourage citizens to keep up to date with routine vaccinations? For example, Belgian pharmacists take part in an annual campaign to encourage citizens to undertake flu vaccinations.

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For more information on these and other public health activities conducted by Community Pharmacists across Europe, please contact the PGEU Secretariat.