

Good Pharmacy Practice

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The International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO) issued a joint document entitled 'Good Pharmacy Practice in Community and Hospital Settings' outlining the profession's core activities and obligations.¹

The document presents a set of standards for the practice of pharmacy which play an important part in the measurement of quality of service to the consumer. While no minimum standard has been set, international, national pharmaceutical organisations and governments have been urged to use this document to set standards for the practice of pharmacy which are appropriate for their country. This editorial aims to outline the main issues presented in this document to reinforce practitioners' commitment to good pharmacy practice.

The primary concern of the practice of pharmacy is the welfare of patients. This is achieved by the profession delivering its services at the highest possible standard. The core pharmacy activity is the supply of medication and other health care products of assured quality, which may at times prove

challenging in terms of access to drugs. Another significant problem which is on the increase and challenges the pharmacist's most basic service, is the issue of counterfeit medicines. While international organisations are attempting to address this issue, pharmacists need to be vigilant to ensure that good quality medicines reach their patients.

Pharmacists also need to provide appropriate advice and information to the patient and are responsible for monitoring the effects of medicines use. Communicating information to the patient requires the pharmacist to possess the appropriate communication skills. Patients have a right to communicate with their pharmacist in a confidential manner, therefore a specific area should be provided where a private conversation can be conducted between pharmacist and patient.

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An integral part of the practice of pharmacy is the pharmacist's contribution to the promotion of rational and economic prescribing and appropriate use of medicines. Pharmacists input into decisions about medicines use is essential and has been shown to have positive outcomes both in terms of patient care and economic outcomes. Apart from having the appropriate infrastructure to achieve these outcomes, pharmacists need to establish positive professional relationships with other health care professionals especially doctors by the setting up of a therapeutic partnership based on mutual trust, respect and confidence in matters relating to pharmacotherapeutics.

Good Pharmacy Practice necessitates that the objective of each element of pharmacy service is relevant to the patient, is clearly defined and is effectively communicated to all those involved. In order for the pharmacist to take decisions which are in the best interest of the patient, the pharmacist should have access to the essential medical and pharmaceutical information about each patient.

The Good Pharmacy Practice Guidelines have identified four main groups of activities for which national standards should be set.

1. Activities associated with the promotion of good health, avoidance of ill-health and achievement of health objectives.

Pharmacists should be actively involved in various health promotion activities and should be at the forefront of campaigns which aim to minimise the abuse or misuse of medicines.

2. Activities associated with the supply and use of medicines and items for the administration of medicines or otherwise related to treatment. This is the profession's core activity and encompasses a vast range of services. These include:
 - Reception of the prescription and confirmation of the integrity of the communication
 - Assessment of the prescription by the pharmacist
 - Assembly of the prescribed item
 - Advice to ensure that the patient or carer receives and understands sufficient written and oral information to derive maximum benefit from the treatment
 - Following up the effect of the prescribed treatments
 - Documentation of professional activities.
3. Activities associated with self-care, including advice about, and where appropriate the supply of a medicine or other treatment for symptoms of ailments that lend themselves to self-

treatment. Individuals self-treat a large proportion of their problems without consulting a health care professional, therefore pharmacists should help people make informed choices about self-care and support individuals by providing correct information and interpreting information put forward by the individual. This necessitates a shift in focus to one of illness management and self-maintenance.

4. Activities associated with influencing the prescribing and use of medicine. Pharmacists need to be proactive in evaluating data on the use of medicines they also need to identify adverse events and medication errors and act in the best interest of the patient.

Regulators and pharmacy association should work together towards setting high standards for the profession while supporting pharmacists to achieve these goals in the best interest of the patient.

References

1. Good pharmacy practice in community and hospital settings: annex 7 to the thirty-fifth report of the WHO Expert Committee on Specifications for Pharmaceutical Preparations. WHO technical report series no.885 Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organisation; 1999:93-101.