

ABSTRACT

Non-adherence by patients to prescribed medications has significant financial consequences. Increasing patient knowledge on drug therapy is said to improve compliance. To design and implement new interventions and to improve patients' knowledge about prescribed drugs, the amount of drug information received by patients and their socio-demographic characteristics should be known. Thereby, a descriptive profile could be developed, which would be useful to doctors and pharmacists in helping to identify patients with specific socio-demographic characteristics, who need special attention when providing drug information.

This descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out in November 2006 with the objective to describe the socio-demographic characteristics of patients treated at the Out Patient Department of the North Colombo Teaching Hospital, Ragama and to assess the information received by them about drugs, issued to them from the pharmacy and the source of that knowledge (including written information).

The study sample consisted of 414 drugs received by 132 out-patients, selected by stratified systematic random sampling technique and the data was gathered by a pre tested interviewer administered questionnaire. Usually the respondents were the out-patients themselves. In the case of children and those who could not stand in queues to get the drugs, the respondents were the caregivers, who accompanied the patients. Respondents' knowledge on drugs issued to them was tested on name, indication, dosage and side effects. Later, their responses were checked with prescriptions and decoded as "correct", "incorrect" or "don't know". Chi-square test was applied to find any statistical association between out-patients' drug knowledge and their socio-demographic characteristics. Significance was tested at $p < 0.05$.

In this study it was found that the prescribers and pharmacists have failed to adequately educate the out-patients on drugs issued to them. Labeling was incomplete, only dosage was written. Therefore, out-patients' knowledge on the name, indication and side effects of the drugs received by them was poor; only about 20%, 26% and 5.6% knew the correct answers, respectively. Further, patients' self awareness was the major source of their knowledge (72%, 60% and 83% respectively).

Contrary to the identity, indication and side effects, out-patients' knowledge on the dosages of drugs is better. Patients knew the correct dosages for

almost 89% of the drugs—issued. Major sources of this information were written (68.2%) and verbal instructions (21.7%) by the pharmacists.

This research showed that respondent's age had no influence on the amount of drug information known to them. Female respondents had better drug knowledge than males. Respondent's level of education had a positive influence on the amount of drug information known to them. With the increase in the level of education, patients received more drug information from the doctor. However, significant amounts of patients with lower level of education received more drug information from the pharmacist.

The findings of this study calls for improvement in the provision of drug information to patients. Prescribers and dispensers must be educated on the importance of giving drug information to patients. They should be urged to take every effort and allocate enough time to impart necessary drug information to patients verbally and in written form. Their skills on communication with patients with low level of education ought to be improved. Drug packs should be labeled in a standard format. Labeling has to include name of the patient, drug name and dosage. It is preferable to print the labeling in Sinhala, Tamil and English.