
128. “I mean, we’re not dealing with lollies, you know”: how pharmacists and pharmacy staff communicate with consumers about generic substitution

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Background

In 2008, the National Prescribing Service developed a toolkit (including prescription intake forms, repeat folders, brand substitution guides and ancillary labels) to improve information provision regarding generic medicines in community pharmacies.

Objective

The qualitative component of a multi-method evaluation aimed to investigate the process of brand switching and communication between pharmacists, pharmacy staff and consumers. Rich description of these processes was sought.

Method

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with pharmacists, dispensary technicians and pharmacy assistants (n = 51) from a range of pharmacies (large and small chains, privately owned; n = 17) in five states.

Data were analysed according to thematic and intersectional methods described by Bazeley (forthcoming).

Results

Communication with customers regarding generic medicines differed according to prescription type and size of pharmacy. Pharmacy assistants were found to employ particularly unique and effective styles of communication about generic medicines with customers.

Three distinct styles of substitution process were identified. One style commences with an opening question and ends with a customer’s ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response, with little other discussion. Another style involves standard, single arguments that are used one by one until consent to switch is achieved, or the arguments are exhausted. A third style commences with an opening question and may end with an argument that is usually successful. The discussion relies on the consumer asking questions, and is facilitated by the pharmacy staff member asking open-ended questions. These styles of communication had implications for the degree to which customers’ consent to accept generic substitution could be considered as ‘informed’.

Conclusion

The qualitative component elicited how the tools were used in community pharmacy, including ways in which the toolkit was useful to pharmacies unanticipated by the designers of the intervention. This evaluation illustrated communication processes used in pharmacies with customers that potentially apply to numerous patient encounters.
