Reviewer's report

Title: Counseling practices in the community pharmacies in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: A cross sectional study

Version: 3
Date: 3 February 2015

Reviewer: Mara Guerreiro

Reviewer's report:

I have assessed the revised manuscript. Overall the authors have adequately addressed my suggestions. In my opinion the manuscript has benefited from the changes introduced by the authors; in particular the discussion section is better structured and stronger in describing the implications for policy and research. In light of the revised manuscript I raise a few additional points, which should generally be seen as discretionary revisions.

• Lines 65 - 74: “Community pharmacists play a crucial role in optimising medication use and improving patient outcomes, whilst preventing medication misuse and reducing costs1,2. Patient counselling associated with dispensing is an important service provided by community pharmacies. Evidence suggests that pharmacists counselling improves clinical outcomes, for example in the management of high glucose levels among diabetic patients, and in the management of blood pressure and cholesterol levels1,3,4. It also improves the quality of life of patients with chronic conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension, and asthma 1,3,4. Pharmacist counselling may reduce health service utilisation, such as visits to general practitioners and rates of hospitalisation3,4. There is also evidence indicating that counselling is effective for improving drug and disease knowledge3,4”

The references provided in this paragraph pertain to counselling in pharmacists’ nondispensing roles. However, the present work focuses on counselling in the context of dispensing. Consequently, I feel the evidence provided is unsatisfactory to justify the relevance of the topic being researched. I would suggest using references specific to the dispensing context (e.g. Williams, K. a., Emmerton, L. M., Taylor, R., Werner,

• Lines 75 and 76: “Many professional organizations have published guidelines outlining required content for counselling in community pharmacies5.”

There is a flow problem with the previous paragraph, which is about counselling in non-dispensing roles. I would suggest adding “when dispensing prescription medicines” in this sentence.

• Lines 92 - 96: “The laws also mandate that medications purchased from a community pharmacy are dispensed in their 93 original packages. The information on the outer package must include information such as the 94 name of the medication, active ingredients, pharmaceutical form, strength, storage condition, 95 price, and manufacturer.”

Unsure whether this level of detail is needed. To better understand the study and its implications I would value information on 1) whether classification - POM or NPM - is mandatory in the package and 2) whether a patient information leaflet is mandatory.

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• Lines 103 - 104: “They 103 monitor the use of non-prescription medicines, identify drug-related problems, and intervene 104 when necessary to ensure that patients use medicines safely, appropriately, and effectively.”

A reference is needed.

• Line 111: “This study aims to investigate the counselling practices of community pharmacists in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia.”

Add “when dispensing POM without a prescription and NPM”.

• Lines 142-143: “There were four scenarios (Table 1). In all the scenarios, pharmacists were assessed on whether 141 they provided the name of the medicine, route of administration, dose, directions for use, and 142 143 duration of therapy.

Clarify at this stage which medicines are classified as POM.

Criteria for assessing pharmacists’ performance pertains to the data collection, perhaps this information would flow better in the section “Documentation of the
counseling process”.

• Line 176: “No information provision” was when no verbal information was given about indications, dosing instructions, adverse effects, or specific instructions.”

Please note that these criteria do not match exactly with what you have previously stated for assessing pharmacists’ performance (line 143)

• Line 150: “This means on 150 visits a medicine was dispense.”

Do the authors mean that a medicine was dispensed in 150 out of 161 SP visits; the former were considered for analysis? Please clarify, it doesn’t flow well considering the previous sentence.

• Table 2 - Total a,b

Did not spot any note for letter b)

• Lines 285 - 289: “Results obtained from the visits using SPs were compared with those obtained in the survey, revealing important discrepancies regarding the type of information provided to customers. In the survey, the majority of the respondents claimed that they provide information on dose, duration of use, and how to use the medication. Nevertheless, actual dispensing practices as measured in the SPs visits showed that patients were poorly informed about such information.

My understanding of data is that overall SP data match survey data concerning the nature of the information provided, but there is a discrepancy on the reported frequency of its provision. For example, SPs data suggest that pharmacists only provide information about dosing and instructions on how to take drugs if probed, whereas pharmacists report frequently informing the patients about the dosing and

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the instructions for taking drugs. Not sure whether discrepancies exist on the “type of information provided”, but rather on its frequency.

• Line 304: Research suggests that product-based requests result in less assessment and counselling than do symptom-based requests.

Add “In the context NPM consultations”.
• Line 315 - 316: Information regarding dose was the most common type of information provided (93% of the SPs visits), while a very small proportion of SPs were counselled on precautions (93% of the SPs visits).
Typo?
• Abstract, line 47: “We conclude that community pharmacist-led patient counselling practices in Saudi Arabia are currently inadequate.”
In light of the convenience sampling used caution should be exerted in respect to generalisability. I would suggest wording the conclusion in the abstract using the same terms and in the body of the paper “The present study highlights the current deficiencies in appropriate dispensing practices and medication counselling at community pharmacies in Saudi Arabia”.
