

Investigating the Integration of Complementary Medicines in Community Pharmacy Practice

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Key Findings

This study investigated the integrations of complementary medicines in community pharmacy practice from the perspective of 4 groups: customers, pharmacists, pharmacy assistant and naturopaths. The utilisation of complementary medicines (CMs) by community pharmacy customers and pharmacists is consistent with that of the general Australian population, with over 70% reporting use of CMs in the previous 12 months. In addition almost all pharmacy assistants reported recent CM use.

Community pharmacy customers prefer to purchase CMs from their community pharmacy, with 60% indicating pharmacy as their preferred supplier. However, the primary reason for this was convenience and product availability, not because of the service they receive. In most cases, the pharmacist does not participate in CM sales as many customers self-select or purchase CMs based on the recommendation of pharmacy assistants, medical practitioners and naturopaths/herbalists. Moreover, in pharmacies employing a CM practitioner, even fewer pharmacists were involved in advising on CMs. Customers however wanted more interaction with pharmacists and expect them to be knowledgeable about CMs, recommend CMs which are effective, to safety information, screen for drug-CM interactions and record the use of CMs in their medication profile. They also want effective CMs to have a 'tick of approval' and be accompanied by more detailed product information. Over half (58%) of customers thought that pharmacies stocking CMs should also employ a CM practitioner.

Pharmacists perceived that they have a professional responsibility to provide customers with information, advice and make recommendations about CM products (>80% of respondents). However many didn't feel equipped to do so lacking both CM knowledge and access to specialised CM resources and relying largely on self-education for their CM information. The majority of pharmacists (85%) believed that additional CM training is required and believed they should be playing a greater role in providing CM-drug interaction information. Only 53% of pharmacists 'always' or 'often' asked patients presenting with prescriptions about use of CMs. The main reasons for not routinely asking was forgetting (41%), perceived lack of opportunity (33%), and thinking it's not relevant (26%).

The majority of pharmacy assistants had received training in CM, most frequently from product manufacturers. Most pharmacy assistants with CM training were confident advising customers and perceived that they knew more about specific CMs than those without training, however, their objective knowledge score was not higher than those without training. When providing information to customers about CM products, most utilise 'their own knowledge', information from leaflets/books and product information.

Eighteen percent of the community pharmacists reported that their pharmacy currently employs an in-store naturopath and the service provided by these CM practitioners was described as valuable or somewhat valuable. Approximately half of community pharmacists stated that they would consider employing a naturopath in-store; and that having appropriate tertiary qualifications was an important consideration. Twenty four percent of surveyed naturopaths had previously worked in community pharmacy, and for most it was a generally positive experience; however major issues are the focus on sales and the integration of different paradigms of health care.

This study has demonstrated the importance of CM as a part of contemporary community pharmacy practice and highlights the need for appropriate education, practice guidelines and resourcing for not just pharmacists but also pharmacy assistants and in-store CM practitioners.

KEY FINDINGS

