The Integration of Practice Standards and Guidelines in Community Pharmacy Practice: a Qualitative Study

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Introduction  The pharmacy professional organisations have developed a range of standards and guidelines to support pharmacists in everyday practice. This research explored the usefulness and implementation of these standards in community pharmacy practice.

Approach and Findings  During August and September 2006, 17 semi-structured interviews with community pharmacists in Queensland explored practice processes and procedures and the utilisation of endorsed standards and guidelines. Staff utilisation and record keeping practices were analysed as well as two core services, namely: (1) the supply of over-the-counter medicines, and (2) the dispensing of prescriptions. The procedures followed concerning the supply of over-the-counter medicines varied. The majority of participants did not regard this as a pharmacist’s immediate role, but rather relied on support staff to identify when the supply required a pharmacist’s intervention. Whilst all participants involved dispensary assistants in the dispensing process, the delegation of procedures differed. Most participants did not clearly differentiate between pharmacists’ and dispensary assistants’ activities. Processes and the involvement of pharmacists in the provision of patient advice varied. Pharmacist intervention record keeping was uncommon and records of ‘near misses’ were not routinely kept by any of the participants.

Conclusion  A lack of integration of practice standards indicated a need to review the standards for relevance. Additionally, pharmacists need to re-evaluate workflow models and the delegation of tasks in the light of new roles and responsibilities.

Future Directions  Involvement in the review of the professional practice standards; further research into community pharmacy processes, risk management procedures and pharmacists’ view of practice changes.

Opportunities for Collaboration in Health  Work related to the provision of primary health care services with a specific focus on medication related issues; medication safety at hospital and primary health care levels; continuum of care between hospitals and community service providers; the scopes of practice of primary health care workers; quality and safety in health care and the development of risk management procedures.