

Pharmacists as educators can improve asthma outcomes

24 June 2008

New research has shown that up to 90 per cent of people on asthma medications are using their inhalers incorrectly leading to poor asthma control, increased hospital visits and increased cost of treatment.

The study then went on to show how a brief educational chat with a pharmacist about inhaler technique and stickers on the medication can lead to improved asthma control in the patients.

Woolcock Institute of Medical Research spokesperson, Associate Professor Helen Reddel said, "Pharmacists and other health care professionals need to effectively show patients how to use inhalers correctly and to promote the importance of inhaler technique on patient outcomes," she said.

"By educating pharmacists on correct technique and then putting in place an easy system for them to relay this knowledge, our research was able to demonstrate a real effect on patient behaviour.

"The inhaler technique intervention took an average of 2.5 minutes per visit, which is short enough to be feasible during routine dispensing procedures," she said.

The research carried out by Dr Iman Basheti of the Faculty of Pharmacy is the first to report on the effect of inhaler technique education alone on asthma outcomes.

All pharmacists who took part in the study attended a general workshop about asthma, inhaled medications and peak flow meter technique. However only pharmacists in the active group were trained to assess and teach dry powder inhaler technique, with the aid of a simple education tool.

The active group pharmacists then delivered interventions to patients at four visits over six months.

An additional component of the intervention was the use of innovative stickers applied to the outside of inhalers to remind patients about the correct technique. Stickers were personalised to highlight each patient's most problematic steps with their inhaler. They were updated at each visit.

At six months improvement in inhaler technique score was significantly greater in the active group, and asthma severity was significantly improved.

Professor Reddel explains the findings of the study reinforce the need for regular assessment and education about inhaler technique.

"The inhaler labels provided a simple visual aid, acting as both a daily reminder of correct technique and as visit-by-visit evidence of progress.

"For people with asthma to obtain the full benefit of medication they must not only use their preventer inhaler regularly, which is itself a challenge, but do so correctly.

"Pharmacist education represents an inexpensive yet effective way of improving asthma control in the community.

"If the results of this study are confirmed in broader populations, this simple pharmacist intervention should be instituted as a routine part of the dispensing of inhaled asthma medications", Associate Professor Helen Reddel concluded.

Source: Research Australia

APA citation: Pharmacists as educators can improve asthma outcomes (2008, June 24) retrieved 6 December 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-06-pharmacists-asthma-outcomes.html>

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