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Strategies to Develop the Dyadic Interpersonal Communication Skills of Pharmacist

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Abstract

It has been seen that most of the pharmacist's problem in communicating about medication to their patient is one way communication and that they lack interpersonal skills. The Pharmacist should be given opportunities to learn and practice interpersonal communication skills during their community advanced pharmacy practice experience (APPE). To ensure the development of communication skills in pharmacy, one can incorporate the learning process "see one, do one, teach one" into their learning activities.

This paper reviews the role of the pharmacist in facilitating development of communication skills for pharmacy practice experiences and providing certain strategies for incorporating interpersonal communication skills in collaboration with the patient care activities. The relationship between the patient and pharmacist is built on the foundation of trust and an open exchange of information; it is a collaborative relationship where a two way communication plays a vital role. The strategies that can be used to build an interpersonal relation at the time of counseling, educating and interviewing a patient are not only verbal but nonverbal (listening, eye contact, body language) and written communication too, which is necessary to improve the use of medications by patients and ensure most advantageous remedial outcomes. Whether pharmacists are communicating with patients, physicians, or colleagues, conflicts will occur. Learning appropriate conflict management strategies will help the pharmacist to tackle conflicts

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that occur in practice. By following these strategies during the normal workflow of the practice, opportunities and tasks the pharmacists can develop a dyadic interpersonal skill.

Introduction

According to Worthen DB, "... the great need is to look at pharmacy from the point of view of the patient—that is, unless we come up with something which deals with people, not pharmacists, not research laboratories, not physicians, not nurses, not drug store proprietors, not the system, et cetera, we really have not added much..." Millis summarizing the first day of the Millis Commission's deliberations in September, 1973.

The time has come to unify the profession in pursuit of its patient care mission. Pharmacy is maturing as a clinical profession and presently is well positioned to transform itself from a product-oriented to a patient-oriented profession. Where the buzzword for healthcare professionals, in part due to the overwhelming reports of medication misuse is Interpersonal communication, which is very important for pharmacists to master. An Interpersonal relation is a meaningful dyadic person- to – person connection. When we share interpersonal relationships with another person, we become interdependent with that person.

Every day Pharmacists use their interpersonal communication skills, whether counseling patients, communicating with physicians, or interfacing with associates, over time we engage in communication of a personal nature, such as friendship, we share our history. Though "Pharmacists are rated first by Gallop polls as America's most trusted professionals" Effective communication by pharmacists is necessary to improve the use of medications by patients and ensure most advantageous remedial outcomes.

Pharmacists can improve patient observance to drug therapy through appropriate strategies, including patient counseling and education. In addition to verbal communication, appropriately written recommendations to physicians to resolve drug therapy problems can be an effective strategy for drug therapy changes. Because of the importance of interpersonal communication skills in practice, pharmacist need appropriate training to develop their own effective communication styles. Practicing these skills is an important component of clinical rotation experiences.

To ensure the development of communication skills in pharmacists, one can incorporate the learning process "see one, do one, teach one" into their learning activities. This paper analyzes the role of the pharmacist in facilitating development of communication skills for pharmacy practice experiences and providing certain strategies for incorporating interpersonal communication skills in collaboration with the patient care activities.

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Incorporating Values of Pharmacist - “The First Stage of Communication”

The history, philosophy, and values of the pharmacists have to be understood by the Pharmacist, then only they will be prepared “to approach/to communicate with patients and physicians” within the pharmacy setting. Communication strategies can differ for each type of relationship that is established with patients and other health care providers. Both written and verbal communication skills will be needed for establishing effective relationships. The Pharmacist should be given opportunities to learn and practice interpersonal communication skills during their community advanced pharmacy practice experience (APPE). They should be clear with the history as what choices are to be made to go in the areas of management, services, and patient care and why are specific services chosen? Secondly, what are the current expectations of the customers and patients? In the philosophy section the pharmacists are taught about the types of communication experiences they will encounter in patient care to guide as they should know whether the pharmacist counsel on every new prescription? What type of written information is frequently used, and what is documented where? Communication strategies to overcome barriers like age, culture, and family size breakdowns, one should be aware to discuss the disease states, conditions, and needs of the patients.

As Virginia Satir says in *The New Peoplemaking* “ Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kind of relationships she/he makes with others ... how productive we are, how we make sense, all depend on our interpersonal skills.” Interpersonal communication skills are needed to avoid the increasing reports of side effects, drug interactions and errors in medication use, in pharmacy practice the benefits are listed in Tables 1 and 2.

Benefits of Consultation to the patient

Assistance with personal care
Additional explanation about the illness
Reduced non compliance
Reduced error in using medication
Pharmacist documents your medical condition and medication history.
Pharmacist provides information to you about your medication.

Table 1

Benefits of Consultation to the Pharmacist

Reduced job stress as patients trust is gained
Pharmacist provides personal service.
Legal protection
Job satisfaction
Table 2

In pharmacies where the pharmacist is important, he or she should be willing to come out from behind the work area and interact with or assist the patient. This enables the pharmacist and patient to be at eye level and also communicates that the pharmacist is accessible, listening and focused on them.

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Craft the Relationship between Patient and Pharmacist

Trust plays a very vital role and the patient and pharmacist relationship is built on this foundation of trust and an open exchange of information; it is a collaborative relationship where a two way communication plays a vital role. Pharmacist should understand the importance of this relationship as it builds over time with each patient encounter. In all practice settings whether it is through counseling, interviewing, or education they have opportunities to interface with patients. Therefore it establishes a relationship of an agreement between pharmacist and patient. This covenant or promise is one of the most important between them. Patients, provide pharmacists with the information needed to effectively manage their medicinal cure. In return the Pharmacists promise to utilize their clinical knowledge and skills to provide the best care for their patients.

Pharmacists should be conscious of the strengths and limitations of their surroundings and take steps to maximize the effectiveness of patient interactions. Listed below table 3 are a few steps to enhance pharmacist's interpersonal communication skill.

The five interpersonal skills to enhance Pharmacists' communication:

1. Ask open-ended questions. Like who, what, where, when, how and why and require more than a yes/no response.
2. Facial expressions, body posture, gestures, tone of voice and eye contact are all forms of nonverbal communication. Concentrate to non-verbal cues.
3. Consider what your non-verbal communication is telling others. Talking to one person while looking at someone or something else is distracting and may be detracting from the words you are saying. Avoid distractions that interfere with your ability to actively listen.
4. What you heard is what the other person was saying. To verify use paraphrasing, clarifying, summarizing and feedback techniques.
5. Communication is skills so set your goals for improvement and practice them with family, friends, colleagues, and customers.

Table 3

While some pharmacists feel that they don't have time to practice many of the skills and techniques described above, research suggests that these practices actually save time.

Pharmacists are the health care providers who focus on patient education on medication: how to take it, what to expect, and side effects and drug interactions. Many pharmacists have been trained to use a counseling method developed by the Indian Health Service (IHS), as it starts the communication with open-ended questions like express empathy or caring attitude so that the patient feels at ease. Use feedback strategies throughout the encounter to ensure patient understanding, Resolve a drug therapy problem in a timely manner which makes the communication more effective and rewarding. Following is an example of how a pharmacist might use reflective responsive strategy.

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Patient: "O, You told me that my prescription would be ready in 20 minutes. It's been almost an hour! All you have to do is put it in the bottle and give me the damn medicine!"

Pharmacist: Sir I apologize. "I can see that this upsets you. Let me see what I can do to help." Notice that the pharmacist did not get distracted by the issue of whether or not all that needs to be done is to "put it in the bottle and give me the damn medicine " Rather stayed focused on the patient's concern which was the amount of time it was taking. And asked what did the Doc tell you the medication is for? How did the doctor tell you to take it? What did the doctor tell you to expect?

Patient: "I just went to the doctor for a routine check-up and she tells me that I've got diabetes! Now I've got to take pills for the rest of my life. What's next? I never should have gone to the doctor. I don't know anything about diabetes!"

Pharmacist: I am so sorry", It sounds like this came as a big surprise to you .Well don't worry just a little precaution and things will be really fine. Would you like some more information on diabetes and what it means?"

Though this is an effective counseling strategy, it is important that the pharmacists should know that apart from verbal communication there are other communication strategies that can help make the pharmacist-patient relationship more strong. People throughout the world use nonverbal cues to help them express themselves, like the active listening (focusing on the patient), eye contact (being attentive, but not staring), The body language (facing the patient and giving them your undivided attention), recognizing and interpreting nonverbal cues from the patient (comparing their nonverbal behaviors to their verbal communication), and being aware of barriers that prevent a good exchange between the pharmacist and patient (lack of privacy, interruptions, noise, etc). The above cues assess whether the communicators are supporting or contradicting the verbal communication to the nonverbal cues.

Community pharmacists communicate in writing to patients and other healthcare providers in a variety of ways developing patient education materials, writing a store newsletter, writing a staff newsletter, preparing a journal club presentation, preparing a patient case presentation, and producing a marketing flyer for a pharmacy event. In all practice settings documentation is becoming more and more important. Pharmacists send a fax / email to a physician's office for clarification, request more information, or report care. These written form of documentation has to be specific, clear and each step in process dependent on results of previous step. Once a decision is made and documented, will not need to revisit it in the future, provides clear documentation of where project has been and where it is going, Use active rather than passive voice. Use plain language instead of jargon. Check readability once document is completed. Providing communication in writing also helps to eliminate confusion and ambiguity over the message that is being sent.

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Strategies beyond Counseling the Patients

Dyadic Interpersonal Communication in diverse forms is becoming more significant in the community of pharmacy. The pharmacists have to realize the need of the hour is to educate the patients coming from different walk of life. Educational sessions provide patients with complete information regarding their medical conditions, treatment strategies, and/or lifestyle changes. With each new communication experience the teaching process “see one, do one, teach one” can reinforce the fundamentals. Asking open-ended questions to determine what patients already know will be the key to prevent pharmacists from providing information that is not needed. Use simple and concise language, the medical terminology used should be adaptable to the patient. Pharmacists often use print material as a teaching aid or supplementary material during the educational process.

There are times when pharmacists need to go beyond counseling and educating patients are when they have to collect more in-depth clinical information. This may occur during the provision of disease state or case management services, a comprehensive medication review, clinical services, or other types of clinical encounter with patients. During this time, pharmacists need to be systematic and organized with the patient interview to ensure that they are competent and comprehensive with data collection. Interviewing a patient is the most complicated process, the pharmacist has to make the patient comfortable, then, explain why he needs to collect the information, what he/she will do with it, and that it will be treated confidentially. Use words/manners that convey professionalism. Pay attention to body language. Ask open-ended questions. Begin with broad questions and then get more specific. Use active listening skills and demonstrate empathy. Ask the patient to restate any unclear information and use paraphrasing feedback strategies to ensure that you understood.

A Two-way Functioning Association with Physicians

A hypothetical model for the development of a physician-pharmacist mutual association has been developed and utilizes participant, context, and exchange characteristics (role specification, trustworthiness, and relationship initiation) describes how pharmacists and physicians move from the earlier stages of two way functioning to one where both parties are committed to the professional relationship. This is the key to success of a pharmacy practice but requires some effort on the part of pharmacists. The pharmacist relationship with the physician has to be scheduled and regular as to It is important to learn as much as they can about the physician’s practice during face to face meetings: the types of patients he/she sees, the practice challenges the physician faces, how he/she likes to receive communications from pharmacists, By learning about a physician’s needs, the pharmacist can develop services that positively affect the care of mutual patients, which may lead to further interest and association with the physician.

Role specification entails pharmacists and physicians understanding each other’s role in the patient care process. This role specification differs with different providers. Some physicians may be contented signing off on a collaborative practice agreement with pharmacists in which

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pharmacists make change in drug therapy based on a physician approved protocol. Other physicians may not be as comfortable with collaborative practice agreements, yet they will accept pharmacists sending in written recommendations. Trustworthiness is another characteristic where the Physicians need to trust the knowledge and clinical skills of pharmacists before they are willing to work with them and/or accept their clinical recommendations. The pharmacists' recommendations should be concise, provide physicians with information that they may not know (e.g., patient adherence to their regimen or other medications that have been prescribed by other providers), and suggest potential solution(s) to drug therapy problems that had been identified. For written or faxed communications to physicians, pharmacist can use standardized forms.

Use of Interpersonal Communication Skills at the Workplace

The world is changing but the need for effective communication is not, we understand from a personal, professional and global perspective how critical it is do our part to make communication work. Communication is at the core of our humanness. We rely on our communicative skills as we confront events that challenge our flexibility, integrity, expressiveness and critical thinking skills. Communication in the workplace begins with respect for other coworkers and a willingness to be team player. To help ensure that coworkers are communicating with one another, regular staff meetings should be scheduled to bring up problems or issues in the workplace in a non-confrontational way. The ability to communicate effectively with others is essential not only for your own success but the success of any organization you work for.

Whether pharmacists are communicating with patients, physicians, or colleagues, conflicts will occur. Learning appropriate conflict management strategies will help the pharmacist to tackle conflicts that occur in practice. It is important for pharmacist to realize that during conflict, their emotions and anger may escalate. This is a time to take a step back, control one's anger, and try not to take the conflict that is occurring personally. To avoid conflict escalation use the Paraphrasing and restating technique example; "Dr. _____, you sound upset because I made this recommendation to discontinue your patient's hydrochlorothiazide." You can't always control what happens to you, but you can control how you deal with it. Accept the situation, Assess the situation, Focus on areas of agreement, Emphasize the positive, Think "win/win", Be tough on facts, but go easy on people. Negotiate, cooperate, comprise, Don't quit at the first sign of discord/trouble, Try to bring the team concept back by moving away from an adversarial role, Be as open as you can, Work to persuade the person that it is in their best interest to overcome the obstacle and properly remediate the facility.

During the normal workflow of the practice, opportunities and tasks arise for the pharmacists to practice good communication skills. At first, assign simple tasks such as researching a patient or physician's drug information question, assisting patients with the location of a nonprescription product, or routine patient counseling on prescription medications, will help to make the pharmacist feel comfortable in the workflow. Then more complex tasks should be added. For

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example, in the normal workflow, a patient may request a nonprescription drug or product consultation. As a Pharmacist you can ask the “Basic Seven question (Location, Quality, Severity, Timing, Setting, Modifying factors, Associated symptoms) i.e. history of the present illness. The Pharmacists should take the opportunity to practice relationship-building skills with some of the patients they encounter during the normal workflow of the practice to enhance effective interpersonal skills.

Conclusion

The need to communicate and how interpersonal communication can help a pharmacist relate more effectively with the physicians and the patients is gaining a lot of importance in the community of pharmacy. Interpersonal communications in health care is the foundation for positive remedial outcomes. Such an approach to communications is a process that involves the pharmacist's ability to find meaning, respond reflectively and to assess understanding. These skills not only are essential for the success of pharmacist but for the success of any organization. The purpose of pharmacists providing more patient care services is to prevent and solve drug-related problems and, ultimately, influence medication use. In particular; pharmacists engaging in pharmaceutical care should focus on their interpersonal and communications skills. A bond of trust will increase pharmacists' opportunities to influence patients' decisions regarding medication use, compliance rates, and, ultimately, overall health outcomes. Pharmacy schools need to increase the interpersonal requirements beginning in the first year of pharmacy school, expose students to the skill and its types in practice experiences before they begin APPEs, and enhance the admissions screening process by including interpersonal testing in all skill areas to help predict academic and professional success Therefore, the Pharmacist should be given opportunities to learn and practice interpersonal communication skills during their community advanced pharmacy practice experience (APPE).

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