A Preliminary Study: Trends, Attitudes, and Barriers experienced by Community Pharmacists when Counseling Patients and Consumers on Over the Counter Medications
Tiffany Chow 1, Harini Murali2, Michael Toscani 1,2, Donna Feudo 2, Richard Petruschke 2
1 Rutgers Institute of Pharmaceutical Industry Fellowships 2 Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey 2 GlaxoSmithKline

Background
In today’s fast pace workflow, pharmacists find themselves challenged for time to provide comprehensive OTC medication counseling due to a variety of reasons. Poor or ineffective medication counseling can lead to unwanted side effects or interactions with other medications patients are taking. Understanding and identifying these practices and barriers can help both pharmacists and patients work together to ultimately improve medication adherence and patient outcomes.

Objective
The objective of this study is to identify current practices and barriers to providing effective over the counter (OTC) medication counseling by pharmacists in a retail setting.

Method
A qualitative, anonymous, and voluntary online survey was sent out through Qualtrics. This survey was disseminated to community pharmacists affiliated with the Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy of Rutgers expedient preceptors who work for both independent and chain pharmacies around the country.

The survey began with questions to understand pharmacists’ backgrounds and where they currently practice in the United States. Follow-up questions then included asking the respondents logistical details on how often they find themselves counseling patients on OTC products and how often they are approached by patients in the retail setting. The remainder of the survey gauged the attitudes and behaviors of the pharmacists regarding OTC counseling as well identifying common barriers they face on a day to day basis.

The data will be indicative of attitudes, behaviors and logistics of pharmacy counseling to help understand what types of resources could be developed to improve patient outcomes and experiences. Descriptive statistics such as ANOVA analysis will be used to characterize the data from survey respondents. A total of 27 responses were collected in the field through the Qualtrics survey. The data displayed here will be used as a preliminary understanding of the trends, attitudes, and barriers of community pharmacists to OTC counseling.

Discussion
74% of pharmacists were approached by patients on OTC counseling at least 25 times a week.

45-55% of pharmacists felt pharmacy environment, patient refusal, and constrained time were equally significant barriers.

Pharmacists felt the top reasons that patients refuse counseling are:
- Pharmacies appear too busy/not accessible.
- Consumers feel familiar with the product and do not require extra counseling.
- The use of online user reviews to determine quality.

Therapeutic area trends:
- Pharmacists received the most questions about cough, cold, and flu. Some questions about pain relief.
- The least common TAs that pharmacists received questions for were smokers health and oral health.

Longer time would be helpful to retail pharmacists.

Opportunities
This survey provided a high-level overview of trends and attitudes towards pharmacist counseling of OTC products. While the sample size of the study was small, several trends were apparent during the data analysis. A total of 74% of pharmacists were approached to counsel on OTC medications at least 25 times a week. Pharmacists believe a barrier to counseling is them appearing too busy and patients confidence on OTC products.

Pharmacists received the most questions about cough/cold/flu and were least prepared to counsel on smokers health and oral health. Resources embedded within a digital platform focusing on target populations and therapeutic areas could be helpful for pharmacists.