

# A Preliminary Study: Trends, Attitudes, and Barriers experienced by Community Pharmacists when Counseling Patients and Consumers on Over the Counter Medications

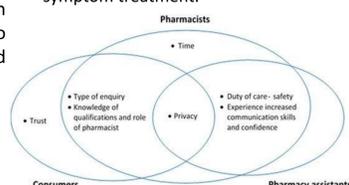
Tiffany Chow<sup>1</sup>, Harini Murali<sup>3</sup>, Michael Toscani<sup>1, 2</sup>, Donna Feudo<sup>2</sup>, Richard Petruschke<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Rutgers Institute of Pharmaceutical Industry Fellowships <sup>2</sup>Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey <sup>3</sup>GlakoSmithKline

## 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.

Previous studies show common barriers often include consumers failure to understand the pharmacist's professional role and they were less likely to exchange information if asking for a specific product than if asking about symptom treatment.<sup>1</sup>



## 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 experiential 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 pharmacist 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.

## Sample of Survey Questions

How often are you approached by consumers to counsel them on OTC products at your pharmacy?

- Never
- Sometimes (1-5 times/week)
- Almost always (10 times/week)
- Always (> 25 times/week)

Here below are common barriers to OTC medication counseling. Please rank them in order from 1 to 4 with 1 being least significant and 4 being most significant.

- Pharmacy environment (i.e. physical design)
- Functional Barriers (i.e. language, culture, disabilities, etc.)
- Patient refuses counseling
- Low staff/no time to counsel

Which therapeutic areas listed below do you receive the most questions or inquiries for OTC counseling? Please rank them with 1 being most frequently asked.

- Allergy relief
- Pain relief
- Digestive health
- Oral health

Based on your physical layout of your pharmacy, is there a private area for patients to utilize for OTC counseling and recommendations?

- Yes
- No

## Limitations

The analysis only included 27 respondents, a small representation of the total pharmacists in the nation. The survey was also limited to pharmacy preceptors associated with the Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy and currently registered in the database.

## Results

Survey Population: Years of Experience in Retail Pharmacy

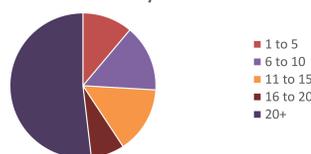


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents in the survey by years of experience.

Primary Reason for Patient Refusal of Counseling

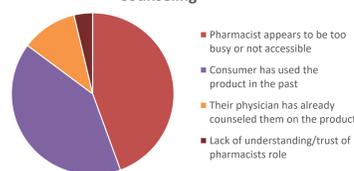


Figure 2. Representation of population on primary reason behind patient refusal of OTC counseling.

Significant Barriers Identified by Years of Experience

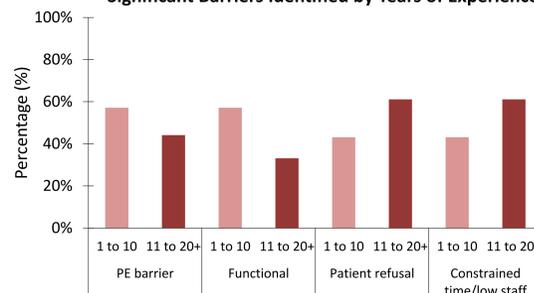


Figure 4. Percentage of pharmacists by years of experience that identified the above as significant barriers to OTC patient counseling.

Therapeutic area that receives the most counseling questions

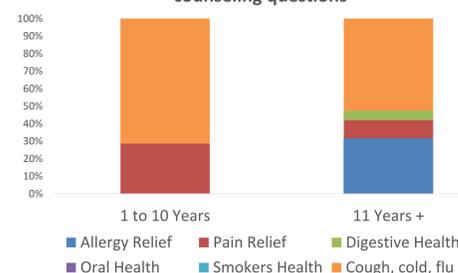


Figure 6. Therapeutic areas that pharmacists are least prepared to counsel for broken down by years of experience

Table 1. Frequency of OTC counseling (% of total respondents).

| Approached by patients (per week) | Patients counseled (per day) |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Never                             | 0 to 5                       |
| Sometimes (1 to 5 times/week)     | 6 to 10                      |
| Almost always (10 times/week)     | 11 to 15                     |
| Always (> 25 times/week)          | 16 to 20                     |
|                                   | 20+                          |

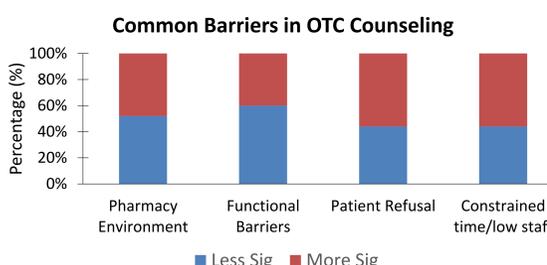


Figure 3. Common Barriers in OTC Counseling (% of total respondents).

Best Clinical Support for INS Counseling

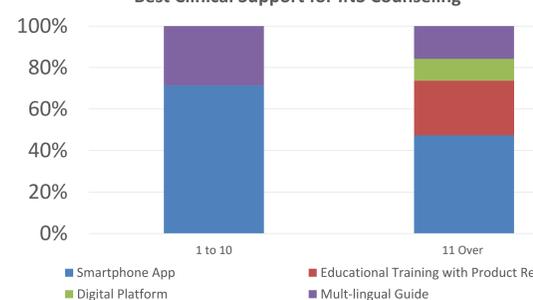


Figure 5. Best resource for pharmacists to use for counseling of INS counseling.

Therapeutic Areas Pharmacists are Least Prepared to Counsel

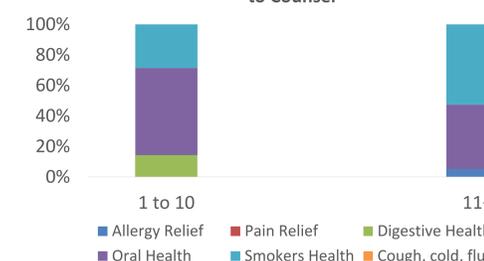


Figure 7. Therapeutic areas that pharmacists are least prepared to counsel for broken down by years of experience

## Discussion

**74%** of pharmacists were approached by patients on OTC counseling at least 25 times per 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:

- Pharmacists appears too busy/not accessible
- Consumers feel familiar with the product and do not require extra counseling

These above results were consistent with a study that reported majority of consumers consider OTC at the pharmacy as transactional source of goods rather than medicine because you don't need a prescription.<sup>1</sup> Sufficient awareness and education should be brought to the patients on adverse events and consequences of OTC medications as they are self selected.

Trends between age groups:

- Pharmacists with 1 to 10 years of experience felt pharmacy environment and functional were more significant vs pharmacists with 11+ years who felt patient refusal and constrained time/low staff were more important
- Functional barriers may be less significant to pharmacists due to increased language support resources but could be a potential barrier for consumers

Therapeutic area trends:

- Pharmacists received the most questions about cough, cold, flu, and some questions about pain relief and allergy relief.
- The least common TAs that pharmacists received questions for were smokers health and oral health. These two TAs were also the category that pharmacists feel least prepared to counsel in.
- Effective resources targeting all years of experience for navigating patient refusal and limited time would be helpful to retail pharmacists

## Opportunities

Pharmaceutical companies to develop resources to help pharmacists with OTC counseling

An app developed with a two way channel between the pharmacist and patient 24/7

Leveraging the digital platform with educational trainings as the foundation

Recent technological advancements allow for automated prescription filling which should enable pharmacists to allot more time to patient counseling

## Conclusions

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 smoker health and oral health. Resources embedded within a digital platform focusing on target populations and therapeutic areas could be helpful for pharmacists.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Seubert, L. "Barriers and Facilitators for Information Exchange during Over-The-Counter Consultations in Community Pharmacy: A Focus Group Study." Pharmacy, December 6, 2017.

## Author Contact Information

**Tiffany Chow**  
tiffany.chow@rutgers.edu  
**Harini Murali**  
harini.x.muralikrishnan@gsk.com

**Disclosure**  
All affiliations and persons represented on this presentation have no conflicts of interests or financial interest.