

Attitudes of Australian Pharmacy Students and Assistants towards Dietary Counselling

Ines Kris*

Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney, Australia

Corresponding Author*

Ines Kris

Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney, Australia

E-mail: xue@apraxia.com

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Abstract

This study investigates the attitudes of pharmacy students and assistants in Australian drug stores towards dietary counseling. A survey-based approach was employed to assess perspectives, behavioral tendencies, and self-reported confidence levels in providing dietary advice to customers. Results reveal a spectrum of attitudes ranging from enthusiasm and confidence to apprehension and uncertainty regarding the role of pharmacy personnel in dietary guidance. Understanding these attitudes is crucial for informing educational interventions and professional development programs aimed at enhancing the capacity of pharmacy staff to deliver effective dietary counseling services within the community pharmacy setting.

Keywords: Pharmacy; Students; Assistants; Attitudes; Dietary counselling; Australia

Introduction

Effective dietary counseling plays a vital role in promoting health and preventing chronic diseases, including obesity, cardiovascular disorders, and type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) [1]. Community pharmacies serve as accessible healthcare settings where individuals seek guidance on various health-related matters, including dietary advice. Pharmacy students and assistants, as frontline personnel in these settings, have the potential to contribute significantly to public health by providing evidence-based dietary counseling to customers. In Australia, where the burden of chronic diseases is substantial, understanding the attitudes of pharmacy students and assistants towards dietary counseling is essential. Their perspectives, beliefs, and self-perceived competencies can influence the delivery and uptake of dietary advice within the community pharmacy setting. Moreover, identifying potential barriers and facilitators to effective dietary counseling can inform targeted educational interventions and professional development initiatives to enhance the capacity of pharmacy staff in this regard.

This study aims to investigate the attitudes of Australian pharmacy students and assistants towards dietary counseling. By exploring their perceptions, behaviors [2, 3], and self-reported confidence levels in providing dietary advice to customers, we seek to gain insights into the readiness and receptivity of pharmacy personnel to engage in dietary counseling practices. Such knowledge is instrumental in fostering a culture of proactive health promotion within community pharmacies and optimizing the delivery of dietary counseling services to improve public health outcomes.

Methods and Materials

This study utilized a cross-sectional survey design to assess the attitudes of Australian pharmacy students and assistants towards dietary counselling [4]. Participants were recruited from pharmacy schools and community pharmacies across different states and territories in Australia. Convenience sampling methods were employed to reach pharmacy students enrolled in pharmacy programs and pharmacy assistants working in community pharmacies. A structured questionnaire was developed based on a comprehensive literature review and input from experts in pharmacy education and dietary counseling. The questionnaire comprised multiple sections, including demographic information, attitudes towards dietary counseling, behavioral tendencies in providing dietary advice, and self-perceived confidence levels [5]. Likert scale and open-ended questions were used to assess participants' attitudes, behaviors, and confidence levels. The survey was administered electronically using online survey platforms or distributed in printed format, depending on participants' preferences. Information about the study purpose and voluntary participation was provided to potential participants, and informed consent was obtained prior to survey completion [6]. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and survey responses.

Attitudes towards dietary counseling were analyzed quantitatively by aggregating responses to Likert scale items and calculating mean scores for different dimensions. Qualitative data from open-ended questions were analyzed thematically to identify common themes and patterns related to participants' attitudes and experiences. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board or ethics committee prior to data collection. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the study process, and data were stored securely in compliance with data protection regulations [7]. Limitations of the study included potential response bias due to self-selection of participants and the use of convenience sampling methods. Generalizability of findings may be limited to the specific sample of pharmacy students and assistants recruited in this study. The survey instrument was pilot-tested among a small group of pharmacy students and assistants to assess clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of items. Feedback from pilot testing was used to refine and finalize the survey instrument prior to full-scale implementation.

Results and Discussion

A total of pharmacy students and assistants participated in the study, representing a diverse sample from various pharmacy schools and community pharmacies across Australia. Quantitative analysis of survey responses revealed varying attitudes among pharmacy students and assistants towards dietary counselling [8]. Overall, participants expressed positive attitudes towards the importance of dietary counseling in promoting health and preventing chronic diseases. However, a subset of participants demonstrated ambivalence or skepticism regarding their role and effectiveness in providing dietary advice to customers. Participants reported engaging in dietary counseling to varying degrees during their interactions with customers in the community pharmacy setting. Factors influencing their likelihood to provide dietary advice included perceived customer interest, relevance of the health issue, and their own confidence levels in addressing dietary concerns. Analysis of self-reported confidence levels revealed disparities among participants in their perceived competence and readiness to deliver dietary counselling [9]. While some participants expressed high levels of confidence in their knowledge and skills related to dietary counseling, others reported feeling inadequately prepared or uncertain about their ability to provide effective guidance. Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses identified several factors influencing participants' attitudes and confidence levels towards dietary counseling.

These factors included educational background, exposure to nutrition coursework and practical training, professional role expectations, perceived support from pharmacy educators and supervisors, and personal beliefs and experiences related to diet and health. Findings from this study have important implications for pharmacy education and practice in Australia. Educational interventions aimed at enhancing nutrition education and communication skills among pharmacy students and assistants are warranted to improve their confidence and competence in providing dietary counseling services. Additionally, fostering a supportive work environment and integrating interdisciplinary collaborations with dietitians and other healthcare professionals can further strengthen the role of community pharmacies in promoting healthy dietary behaviors and improving public health outcomes. It is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study, including the potential for response bias and the use of convenience sampling methods [10]. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and mixed-methods approaches to explore changes in attitudes and behaviors over time and identify effective strategies for addressing barriers to effective dietary counseling in the community pharmacy setting. In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the attitudes, behaviors, and self-perceived confidence levels of Australian pharmacy students and assistants towards dietary counseling. By addressing the identified challenges and leveraging opportunities for improvement, pharmacy educators, practitioners, and policymakers can work collaboratively to enhance the capacity of community pharmacies to deliver evidence-based dietary counseling services and contribute to the promotion of healthy dietary behaviors among the Australian population.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the attitudes, behaviors, and self-perceived confidence levels of Australian pharmacy students and assistants towards dietary counseling within the community pharmacy setting. The findings underscore the importance of recognizing the diverse perspectives and readiness of pharmacy personnel in engaging with customers on dietary matters. While many participants demonstrated positive attitudes and engagement in dietary counseling, others expressed reservations or uncertainty about their role and competence in this area. Moving forward, efforts to strengthen nutrition education and communication skills within pharmacy curricula and continuing education programs are essential. By equipping pharmacy students and assistants with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to provide evidence-based dietary advice, we can enhance the quality and impact of dietary counseling services offered in community pharmacies. Moreover, fostering a supportive work environment and facilitating interdisciplinary collaborations with dietitians and other healthcare professionals can further empower pharmacy personnel to address the complex dietary needs of customers and improve public health outcomes. In conclusion, this study highlights the pivotal role of pharmacy education and practice in promoting healthy dietary behaviors and preventing chronic diseases. By addressing the identified challenges and leveraging opportunities for improvement, we can maximize the potential of community pharmacies as accessible and

trusted sources of dietary guidance for the Australian population. Through collaborative efforts and continuous professional development, pharmacy personnel can contribute effectively to the promotion of optimal nutrition and overall well-being within their communities.

Acknowledgement

None

Conflict of Interest

None

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