

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE USE OF OTC MEDICINES

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Most of the pharmacists in Pakistan while selling drugs to their patients/customers do not demand a prescription. They even do not ask them for what ailment you need these medicines. Antibiotics, blood thinners and sometimes even sleeping pills are available without a regular prescription. Young children are sent to the medical store with the name of medicine written on a chit which they hand over to the store person and thus can easily get the medicine from the medical store.

A large majority (more than 80%) of the medical stores are not run by qualified pharmacists rather medical technicians or at the most B-Pharmacy certificate holders take care of selling drugs to public, whereas in advanced countries, no pharmacy can be run without a qualified pharmacist.

It is an open secret that many physicians and medical stores in collaboration with each other unnecessarily recommend/prescribe more medicines for patients and then share the profit between themselves. The patients are thus heavily taxed for no fault of them. In countries such as the US, Canada, Australia, pharmacists discourage the physicians from recommending more medicines than required.

Almost all medical stores carry a large number of non-prescription drugs which are commonly used to treat minor ailments. These items are called as OTC i.e., available "Over the Counter". Anybody can buy any or all of these items from any medical store. Ailments such as cough, flu, headache, toothache, etc. can often be treated by using OTC items. However, one has to be

careful in using such medicines for too long and too much without consulting a doctor.

Medicines are usually contained in plastic bottles or containers. Instructions to use medicines are given without fail on the containers or in the brochures, but some patients ignore these instructions and go their own way and thus get into serious trouble. It happens not only in Pakistan but many times elsewhere as well. A survey carried out in this connection by a committee of physicians in USA/Canada indicated the following:

1. Patients are more likely to take OTC products, but compliance with "Use as Directed" is poor. Recent research suggests that there is still work to be done in ensuring appropriate use of certain OTC medicines in children. Labels on cough and cold products (CCP) indicate that these products should not be used in children younger than six. The researchers concluded. "Stronger measures may be needed to curtail OTC use particularly for younger and those with multiple children.
2. Another report suggests that adverse events from OTC medicines are not uncommon. It further shows that 178,000 hospitalizations occur each year in the US due to adverse events from OTC medicines, with seniors being at a higher risk. Over or under dosing were typical examples.
3. Several patients who appeared to have chronic fatigue but later on it turned out to be from consuming OTC antihistamines. Some cases were from products labeled as non-



drowsy, suggesting not everyone responds to the drugs the same way. Oral NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) are the biggest concern. People commonly either overuse or underutilize them, causing a plethora of side-effects ranging from gastritis to hematochezia (vomiting with blood) or ineffectiveness, respectively.

4. In general, OTCs are sometimes perceived as totally safe. A senior physician suggested that when talking to patients about OTCs, must emphasize that they are still medicines and require attention. This may help them to perceive OTC treatments are in fact medicines.

While the number of OTC products is daunting and doctors cannot get to know all of them. It is therefore suggested that every few months just stop by your local pharmacy and walk through the aisles to get a feel for what is available. If you recommend some OTC and the person had a bad reaction to it or misused it, you could be liable for it, even though you did not prescribe it. Preferably, OTC drugs should be kept in separate shelves and be labeled as such. Moreover, only registered OTCs should get place in any medical store.

REFERENCES

1. Wysong, P. Use as directed. The M. Post, May, 2017.
2. Personal observations during over 10 years period.