

## The Role of the Pharmacist in Health Promotion

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### Introduction

Health promotion has the objective of promoting wellness which is the achievement of optimal health within the limits of each person's own being. This is achieved by optimizing wellness through good nutrition, by achieving a good level of fitness and by managing stress. Health professionals in general who seek to practice health promotion must view each person as a whole person. This is described as having a holistic approach, and involves attempting to integrate the needs of the mind, body and spirit. Pharmacists should be aware that health promotion is practiced by all members of the health care team but that the community pharmacist has probably the best opportunity of all health professionals to be involved in health promotion.

### Health education

Health education is a vital and integral part of health promotion.

A. It provides information to influence an individual's attitude and behavior. This is achieved by educating the general public in the following areas:

- 1) how to look after the body
- 2) how to use the health services that are available
- 3) giving information about local, regional and national policies.

B. It is not just aimed at unhealthy people.

Health education may be considered as Primary, Secondary or Tertiary depending on the main purpose of the education.

**Primary health education:** Primary health education is aimed at preventing ill health. Pharmacists have been very active in primary health education through being involved in both individual and coordinated initiatives to encourage Smoking Cessation, increase Sun Awareness, improve Sexual health, provide Contraception Advice and remind young parents of Immunization Schedules.

**Secondary health education:** Secondary health education is aimed at ill people in order to restore them to good health. This may involve a behavior change on the part of the person receiving the information. For example a change of diet would be advisable for a person having high cholesterol levels. It could also involve advice on how to avoid side-effects that were being experienced to a particular

medication or advice on how to use an inhaler correctly to someone suffering from asthma.

**Tertiary health education:** Tertiary health education is aimed at providing the best quality of life for someone who could not normally expect to be restored to full health. This type of advice is aimed at helping the patient to follow a healthy lifestyle. For example, this would include advice to the elderly on accident prevention or advice to the person with diabetes on how to prevent developing diabetic associated complications.

## Health promotion and the pharmacist

Health promotion activities by the pharmacist can be divided into four categories:

1) promoting health and well being (eg., nutrition, physical activity)

2) preventing illness (smoking cessation, immunization, travel health, drug abuse detoxification, advice against 'binge drinking' of alcohol)

3) identifying illness (eg., screening and detection of disease)

4) helping to maintain the health of those with chronic or potentially long-term conditions (eg., asthma, hypertension, diabetes, epilepsy, TB).

Table I gives a list of health promotion topics that can be dealt with in the community pharmacy.

**Table I.** Health promotion topics dealt with in the community pharmacy.

Accident prevention - especially for the elderly
Alcohol consumption
Asthma
Aspirin for prevention of CHD & DVT
Coronary heart disease
Contraception
Diabetes
Drug misuse
Emergency hormonal contraception
Folic acid and pregnancy
Head lice & Other infestations
Immunization*
Lipid management
Men's health / Women's health
Mental health awareness
Nutrition

**Table I. Health promotion topics dealt with in the community pharmacy. (cont.)**

Physical activity
Obesity & weight reduction
Oral health
Safe sex
Skin cancers/sun awareness
Smoking cessation
Travel health *

\* Immunization : Pharmacists should be aware of the immunization schedules currently followed in their countries of work. In the UK the accepted policy is updated when considered necessary. The current policy will be similar to the schedule given below.

#### **The first year of life**

Adsorbed Diphtheria, Tetanus and (whole cell) Pertussis Vaccine 3 doses at intervals of 4 weeks, first dose at 2 months of age plus Haemophilus Influenzae type b Vaccine 3 doses at intervals of 4 weeks, first dose at 2 months of age plus Meningococcal Group C Conjugate Vaccine 3 doses at intervals of 4 weeks, first dose at 2 months of age plus Polimyelitis Vaccin, Live (Oral) 3 doses at intervals of 4 weeks, first dose at 2 months of age.  
BCG vaccine (for neonates at risk only)

#### **During second year of life**

Measles Mumps and Rubella Vaccine, Live Single dose at 12-15 months of age Haemophilus

Influenzae type b Vaccine (if not previously immunized) Single dose at 13 months - 4 years of age

#### **Before school or nursery school entry**

Adsorbed Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis (Acellular Component) Vaccine Single Booster Dose plus Poliomyelitis Vaccine Live (oral) Single booster dose

Preferably allow interval of at least 3 years after completing basic course plus Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine, Live Single Booster Dose.

Between 10-14 years of age

BCG Vaccine (for tuberculin - negative children) Single dose

#### **Before leaving school**

Adsorbed Diphtheria (low dose) and Tetanus Vaccine for Adults and Adolescents Single Booster Dose plus Poliomyelitis Vaccine, live (Oral) Single booster dose.

#### **During adult life**

No adult should remain unimmunized.

## High risk groups

For example when health care workers and travelers are at risk from greater exposure and when special categories, eg., expectant mothers, or, special age groups, eg., the elderly, are particularly vulnerable. The following are examples of vaccines which may be given in such circumstances but they do not form an exhaustive list. Hepatitis A Vaccine Hepatitis B, Vaccine Influenza, Vaccine, Pneumococcal Vaccine, Poliomyelitis Vaccine, Live (Oral), Rubella Vaccine, Live.

\*Travel health: No immunization requirements for travelers to the USA, Europe, Australia or NZ although travelers should have immunity to Tetanus and Poliomyelitis (and childhood immunizations should be up to date). In non European areas surrounding the Mediterranean, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America, certain special precautions are required. Information on health advice for travelers can be obtained at <http://www.doh.gov.uk/hat/hatcvt.htm>

## Methods of health promotion used by pharmacists

Provision of health promotion materials.

- 1) Leaflets
- 2) Librarisers of books, videos and CDs for loan

Health promotion displays.

- 1) In-store posters
- 2) Window displays

Products

Sugar free medicines and drinks, dental hygiene materials, folic acid supplements, nicotine replacement

therapy products, low sodium salt etc.

No smoking policy

A no-smoking policy should be in force among the pharmacy staff and within the pharmacy premises. This gives a positive message to all who enter the pharmacy that the pharmacist is interested in putting into practice the advice he/she gives to others.

Consultation areas/room

A special area or room where customer/ pharmacist consultations can take place without being overheard by others should be provided.

## Sales of non medicinal products related to health

Examples of Health Promotion activities when sales of certain products are made are given below.

1. SUNGLASSES-Leaflet on Sun Awareness
2. CHILDREN'S TOOTHPASTE -  
Leaflet on Oral Health
3. SLIMMING FOODS - Discussion on  
healthy eating and leaflet on Weight Control
4. NIT COMB - Discussion and leaflet  
on Head Lice
5. DIABETIC CHOCOLATE - Healthy  
Eating leaflets, encourage customer to  
join a Diabetes support group
6. OVULATION TESTING KIT -  
leaflet on Folic Acid

## Sales of medicines

OTC sales give the pharmacist the opportunity to relate the purchase to some Health Promotion

activity. For example the purchase of medicine for cystitis or thrush could be accompanied by a leaflet on Women's Health.

### Prescription medicines

The obvious example is warning the patients of the dangers of driving while taking certain medicines. Patients receiving medicines for

hypertension and cardiac conditions should be encouraged to eat healthily (diet low in animal fat, plenty of fruit and vegetables) stop smoking and reduce their sodium intake. Table 2 shows the advice of the American Cancer Society on Nutrition and Cancer. Good nutrition can actually prevent the development of various cancers, diabetes and hypertension.

**Table 2. Nutrition and cancer**

1. Avoid obesity
2. Cut down on fat intake
3. Eat more high fiber foods, such as whole grain cereals, fruit and vegetables
4. Include in the daily diet foods rich in vitamins A & C
5. Include in the daily diet cruciferous vegetables, such as cabbage, broccoli, Brussel sprouts, Kohlrabi and cauliflower
6. Be moderate in consumption of alcoholic beverages
7. Be moderate in consumption of salt cured, smoked and nitrite cured foods.

### Responding to symptoms or request for advice

The pharmacist has many opportunities for Health Promotion that come into this category. A very important function which the pharmacist can perform is to act as a screen for the detection of possible major illnesses and to refer such patients to their doctor.

### Cooperation with other health professionals

The pharmacist should liaise with other health professionals and local health promotion units and cooperate with them in special Health Promotion projects.

## Conclusion

It can be seen from the foregoing that the pharmacist is well placed to have an important role in Health Promotion. Remember that the state of wellness involves both care and concern for self and the activity of reaching out to others - the giving of one's time, energy and expertise to the wider community. The rewards that come from serving others in this way are immeasurable. One of the main purposes to our being here on this earth is to provide loving service to others. This is part of the greatest purpose of why we are alive - that is to love and to serve the God Who made us and Who loves and cares for us.