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Counseling on Exercise: The Pharmacist's Role

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Counseling on Exercise: The Pharmacist's Role

A Thesis

Presented to the

College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences

and

The Honors Program

of

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

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Abstract

Only one in three adults in the United States meets the weekly physical activity recommendations, and only 5% of adults are active for at least 30 minutes a day.¹ Exercise is a key component of health and wellness, especially for patients already experiencing comorbid conditions. Exercise has been proven to help alleviate pain in patients experiencing anything from low back pain to fibromyalgia and has been a helpful adjunct in diabetes management.² Pharmacists are in an exciting position to advocate for changes in patients' lifestyles daily and are in an incredibly accessible position to do so. However, exercise management and recommendations are generally not a large part of formal pharmacy education although it is understood that patients should be exercising. What qualifies as exercise though? What exercises should pharmacists be recommending to patients? With little formal education in this area, pharmacists may feel they do not have the resources to properly assess and make recommendations for patients in this area. The primary objective of this study is to analyze how equipped current pharmacists feel counseling on exercise recommendations. Data from this study will assess if there is a gap in knowledge and comfort in counseling on exercise among pharmacists, providing the foundation to enhance education and resources for pharmacists to counsel in this area more effectively and efficiently. In a world that is becoming increasingly sedentary, it is crucial we, as pharmacists, expand access to exercise ideas, suggestions, and even conversation to help motivate our patients to be active and healthy.

Introduction

Pharmacists are the most accessible healthcare provider and have a great opportunity to influence patients' lifestyles. Community and ambulatory care pharmacists in particular have the opportunity to develop relationships and regularly counsel patients to lead healthy lives through these interactions. Incorporating an exercise regimen into daily life is a key part of staying healthy. Pharmacists are well poised to help counsel on lifestyle changes in order to initiate and manage exercise as part of a patient's healthcare plan. The primary objective of the study aims to assess how comfortable pharmacists in these settings are counseling on exercise recommendations.

Methods

An IRB approved survey was sent out to ambulatory care and community pharmacists in the greater Indiana area. All pharmacists surveyed had an affiliation to Butler University, Purdue University, or Manchester University.

The survey contained approximately 15 questions. The questions were 25% demographic in nature, 25% opinion based, and 50% knowledge based. Participation was completely voluntary, and responses were submitted anonymously.

Results

One hundred and twenty-two pharmacists replied to the survey and their responses were analyzed through Qualtrics reports. Respondents included pharmacists that had been in practice for 5 or less years (26.23%), 6-10 years (25.41%), 11-15 years (13.11%), 16-20 years (11.48%), 21-25 years (9.02%), and over 25 years (14.75%). Ambulatory care

pharmacists accounted for 42.62% of respondents, and community practice pharmacists accounted for 52.46% of respondents.

Pharmacists were first asked if they recommended exercise as part of a patient's medication and disease state management counseling. Less than 15% of pharmacists reported that they "always" incorporated exercise recommendations into patient counseling, and about 15% of pharmacists admitting to never or "rarely" incorporating exercise into patient counseling. The remaining 70% of pharmacists fell into the "sometimes" or "often" realm. Although most pharmacists admit they incorporate exercise into medication and disease state management counseling in some capacity, only about 30% of pharmacists feel "very comfortable" recommending exercise to patients. Another 30% of pharmacists expressed they were "slightly comfortable" incorporating exercise recommendations into counseling, leaving a significant number of pharmacists that feel uncomfortable or "neutral" about their ability to counsel on exercise recommendations. Even though most pharmacists report some level of comfort with exercise counseling, 94% of pharmacists still believe there is a disconnect between exercise management and pharmacological management.

The remaining questions were designed to potentially identify perceived gaps in exercise and pharmacological management. A few gaps were potentially identified due to the following results:

Ninety percent of surveyed pharmacists properly identified a correct exercise recommendation for patients with osteoporosis, but only 25% of surveyed pharmacists properly identified an anerobic exercise.

Seventy-seven percent of pharmacists surveyed were able to accurately identify physical activity guidelines put forth by Health and Human Services (HHS), yet only 42% of surveyed pharmacists were familiar with these guidelines.

Only 35% of pharmacists surveyed reported they felt “very prepared” or “prepared” to give exercise recommendations to patients in regard to their goals or disease states, with just over 20% of pharmacists surveyed feeling “unprepared” or “very unprepared” in this area. The remaining pharmacists reported a “neutral” feeling towards goal-oriented or disease-specific counseling. At the end of the survey, 93% of pharmacists expressed they would feel more comfortable with exercise management counseling if provided further education materials.

Discussion

The healthcare system in America used to be primarily “fee-for-service”, where every service provided had a fee, and anything outside of the fee-based services was not prioritized. In recent years, the American healthcare system has begun moving towards value-based service. Value-based healthcare measures health outcomes by placing worth on helping patients reduce effects of chronic disease, encouraging holistic health and improving the overall health of patients.³ A healthcare model that emphasizes preventative steps and lifestyle change should prioritize incorporating lifestyle recommendations into medication and disease state management counseling for patients. Pharmacists are readily available to counsel on lifestyle modifications, and one area that applies to nearly all patients is exercise.

As previously discussed, only 1 in 3 adults meet the weekly physical activity guideline recommendations from Human and Health Services (HHS). Furthermore, only 5% of adults are active for at least 30 minutes a day.¹ Some of this inactivity may be due to how American

society currently operates: many Americans sit all day at a desk, commute by car, and utilize services built for ease and convenience, such as the drive-thru and delivery.

Increasing and incorporating exercise recommendations can help every patient, and exercise can be tailored to each patient and their goals and needs. Exercise has also shown to be effective in pain management, helping patients decrease their overall number of medications, as well as in diabetes, hypertension, and overall heart health management.^{2,4,5} Increasing exercise in patients' daily lives can also lead to a decrease in overall rate of obesity and metabolic syndrome in society due to an inactive lifestyle.^{1,4}

Pharmacists are the most accessible healthcare provider, and they are readily available to be an advocate for lifestyle change and exercise management. They are available at almost any time of the day, including weekends, by phone or in person, to answer many questions patients may have related to basic exercise recommendations and lifestyle management.

The survey results indicate pharmacists express general knowledge of exercise and recommendations specific to disease states. However, there is room to grow in this area of education for pharmacists. Pharmacists surveyed were not as comfortable identifying anaerobic versus aerobic exercises or utilizing the physical activity guidelines published by Human and Health Services (HHS). In fact, 93% of pharmacists expressed they would feel more comfortable with exercise management counseling if provided further education materials.

Education related to exercise and lifestyle modifications should be a focus area in PharmD curricula. Every patient can benefit from the implementation of some form of exercise that is tailored to the patients' needs and goals. Therapeutic management of disease states should

also include implementation of exercise. Pharmacy students should learn about resources to help enable patients to make healthy lifestyle improvements that include exercise as part of their healthcare plan. Overall, pharmacists surveyed in this study displayed varying levels of comfort on exercise counseling. With further materials and/or resources, pharmacists can eliminate patient barriers to exercise and educate more patients on exercise that will work for them.

Disclosures

I have no financial and/or conflicts of interest to disclose. I am a certified personal trainer as well as a Doctor of Pharmacy Student.

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