

Current Knowledge of Patients Regarding their Medication

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Although Sri Lanka has a free health care system and its benefits are enjoyed by every group of the population, the levels of resource use are not yet developed parallel to the increasing number of patients coming to hospitals. Specially, the out-door patient wards are overcrowded. The lack of sufficient staff like doctors and pharmacists has increased the patients per doctor/pharmacist ratio. Hence, the doctors or pharmacists cannot allocate adequate time to provide information to individual patients regarding their medication. Due to this limitation, the knowledge of patients about their medications and proper use and storage of the medications appear to be low. We designed this pilot survey to assess the current knowledge of patients on their medication in terms of identification, proper use and storage, and to identify how the level of knowledge changes according to socio-economic status of the patient.

The study was designed as a survey and conducted in the outdoor patients ward in the Anuradhapura Teaching hospital, North Central Province of Sri Lanka. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from patients, and the researcher filled in the questionnaire. Data was collected from randomly selected patients who have been receiving repeated treatments.

There were 64 patients in the study, and all were taking repeated treatments from the hospital outdoor patient ward and their age varied from 18 to 72. There were 21 males and 43 females in the study group. Only 8.2% of the participants had not attended school, while 44% had passed the G.C.E. Ordinary Level examination and the monthly income varied from 1000 LKR to 35000 LKR with a mean of 14500 LKR.

Only 20% (13) of the participants knew the name of the drugs they use and 42% (27) were aware that there may be side effects. Majority, 61% (8) from the group who knew the name of the drug had an education level above the G.C.E. O/Level. None of the participants who had started taking treatment within one month knew the name of the drug they were using. Among the participants, 90% (58) were aware that the drugs should be properly stored for protection, 42% (27) believe that the drugs should not be exposed to air and 15% (10) believe that the drugs should not be exposed to germs. Interestingly, nobody mentioned that the drugs should be stored away from children. It was learnt that 50% (32) of the patients like to discuss with their doctor, but only a few of them had actually done it.

The current level of knowledge of patients receiving treatment from the hospital is not adequate. Although the education level and the duration appear to be connected to this situation, the lack of proper communication with the doctor or a pharmacist may be an additional contributory factor. A wider survey with clear measurements of socio-economic status and patient's attitude is needed for an in-depth understanding of the problem.