

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

# Pharmacists in the provision of oral healthcare advice

An evaluation of the role played by community pharmacies in oral healthcare situated in a primary care trust in the north of England

P. E. V. Maunder, D. P. Landes *Br Dent J* 2005; 199: 219–223

## Objectives

To determine the existing state of oral healthcare advice, products and information provided by community pharmacies in Durham Dales Primary Care Trust area, and determine their potential role in the provision of oral healthcare services.

## Methods

A semi-structured questionnaire was devised to examine the current role of community pharmacies in oral healthcare. An interview was arranged with each of the pharmacies.

## Results

Ninety per cent of pharmacies participated from the Trust area. Common presenting complaints were ulcers and toothache/pain relief. Pharmacists advised customers to see a dentist in 94.1% of cases, 23.5% to see a doctor, 41.2% gave oral hygiene advice and 100% gave short-term pain relief. Pharmacists were keen to improve oral health knowledge. Most were aware of the nearest dental practices but few knew arrangements for emergencies/appointments. There were 14 pharmacists wanting active roles in promotional activities and national campaigns. Issues raised were lack of known key contacts for referrals/advice and lack of support on integration into primary healthcare teams.

## Conclusion

Through new pharmacy contracts and support/education, pharmacists could perform an increased role in oral healthcare provision.

## COMMENT

Team working is now acknowledged as a key concept in the delivery of oral healthcare. While this is most often discussed in the context of members of the 'dental team', this study provides a useful reminder of the potential contribution of healthcare professionals, beyond the confines of the surgery.

The study sought, via a questionnaire/interview survey, to examine community pharmacists' views on the provision of oral healthcare advice, products and information. Involving just 17 pharmacies, the majority of which were independently owned and situated in a rural location, the generalisability of the findings are limited, but nevertheless raise some important points of relevance to pharmacists, dental practitioners and healthcare commissioners.

Overall, the participating pharmacists had a positive outlook on their potential contribution to the provision of advice relating to oral health and were confident in their ability to do so. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in the majority of cases, pharmacists advised patients complaining of pain or mouth ulcers to see a dentist. However, only one quarter were aware of the opening times of their local dental surgery and even fewer were aware of arrangements for emergency care. In a future era of increased locality based commissioning, there is the potential for increased collaboration amongst healthcare professionals. It would be interesting to know for example, how many readers of the *BDJ* have made their local pharmacy colleagues aware of their preferences for seeing emergency patients.

In their discussion, the authors usefully outline the various ways in which pharmacists may advise of behaviours and practices conducive to good oral health. However the degree to which future legislation permits pharmacists to assess and dispense emergency medication for dental conditions, as is suggested by the authors, requires careful consideration.

Finally, although this paper has concentrated on the views, actions and educational needs of pharmacists it should be remembered that the majority of customer interactions in a community pharmacy are not with the pharmacists but with the counter staff and pharmacy assistants, who will frequently be responsible for dispensing oral health advice. Their training needs must also be considered.

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## IN BRIEF

- Demonstrates the use made by members of the public in obtaining oral health advice from pharmacists.
- Recommendations/proposals for PCTs on improving the oral healthcare provision by their pharmacies.
- A useful analysis for comparison for pharmacists and GPs in the UK.
- Identifies some of the recent Department of Health requirements for PCTs and pharmacists.