

Role of community pharmacists in the management of headache disorders

Suela Kellici^{1*}, Gladiola Elezi², Joana Mihani²

¹Department of Pharmacy, Faculty of Medicine, University of Medicine, Tirana, Dibra Street 376, 1005 Tirana, Albania

²Community Pharmacy Sector, Tirana, Albania

Introduction

The role of pharmacists has evolved in the recent years from being mainly an expert on drugs on being an expert of both drugs and disease. By this point of view, the community pharmacist must cope with several clinical aspects in the treatment of different pathologies. The counselling process becomes crucial for the success of the drug therapy (Dunn et al., 2015; Nigro et al., 2014).

Headache is a common condition experienced by many people. Its treatment becomes very important as it is considered as one of the leading three of the several contributors to the global burden of disease (Steiner et al., 2015).

The aim of this study is to evidence the management of the headache condition by the community pharmacists in two different areas of the Albanian territory.

Materials and methods

We conducted a cross sectional study in two cities of Albania: Tirana, the capital and Kukes a small city in the north Albania. A structured questionnaire was filled in by 80 pharmacists in Tirana and 20 pharmacists in Kukes. The pharmacists were selected randomly from the list of pharmacists at each of the cities. All pharmacists accepted to participate; therefore, the response rate was 100%. Data collection was performed in 3 months: March-June 2019. Data collection included age, gender, years of professional experience, frequency of headache management, questions related to the type of headache, questions related to the drugs recommended and other recommendations.

Results and discussion

The age of the pharmacists varied between 23-66 years in Tirana and 24-56 in Kukes. We noticed a higher prevalence of the older pharmacists in Kukes and most of them were also owners of their pharmacies. 80% of the pharmacists in Tirana and 55% in Kukes were female. The years of experience of pharmacists ranged from 1 year to 44 years, showing a youngest generation of pharmacists in Tirana. This is in conformity with the fact that most of the Albanian population is working in Tirana as the capital city. In the recent years there is a tendency of the young professionals in Albania to work in the capital city or abroad (INSTAT, 2015). 80% of the pharmacists in Tirana and 50% in Kukes report that manage at least one case of headache each day, demonstrating that this health condition is often present in the Albanian population. The higher presence of headache in Tirana as compared with Kukes may be due to the bigger population and/or to the higher level of stress in the capital city.

90% of pharmacists in Tirana and 100 % in Kukes try to understand the headache localization; 76.2 % and 90 % respectively in the two cities ask the patients about the frequency of the headache; while 22.5 % and 100 % respectively ask the patients about the persistence of the headache. The higher percentage of involvement of the pharmacists in understanding the typology of headache in Kukes may be influenced by the higher number of experienced pharmacists.

Regarding the severity of the headache we found that only 80% and 35% of the pharmacists respectively tries to investigate about the severity of the headache. 78.8% and 60% ask also for family history with any type of

headache. All the above responses demonstrate a strong commitment of the pharmacists in both cities in the management of headache.

In both cities the most recommended drugs to treat the headache are non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), while only a small number of them suggest to the patients a medical visit (7.5% in Tirana and 5% in Kukes). While this involvement of the pharmacists in the treatment of the headache is considered a good professional accomplishment, the low referral to the doctor can be also harmful in certain cases, when the medical assistance is needed (Da Costa et al., 2019).

A considerable number of pharmacists reported to use the same drug for the treatment of migraine. This can be explained also with the drug advertisement strategies conducted from the pharmaceutical companies. The commercial advertisements seem to have a considerable impact on the patient preferences toward a certain drug, especially in Tirana (63.7%), while this influence seems to be lower in Kukes (30%). There are controversial evidences related to the potential benefits of these advertisements (Gilbody et al., 2005). The pharmacists included in our study confirm their contrariety to the influence of drug advertisement on their patient's behaviors. In both cities' pharmacist try to advice the patients about the management of the headache (advices are given from 72.5 % of the pharmacists in Tirana and 60% in Kukes). But these advices are related mainly to the drugs and only in limited cases patients are advised to follow a healthy life style with adequate physical activity ecc. The influence of the lifestyle factors is investigated in different studies showing that healthy lifestyle habits are an important tool in the management of headache (Hagen et al., 2018; Varkey et al., 2008).

Conclusion

This study has shown that the management of headache is similar in different areas of the Albanian territory. The prevalence of headache is high and pharmacists encounter different problems while managing headache such as influence of commercial advertising and limited drugs to treat specific conditions. Pharmacists should become aware of the relevance of the referral process when managing certain conditions and they should consider also the education of their patients in the conduction of a healthy lifestyle.

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