NONPRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS AND SELF-CARE

Nonprescription Medication Therapy and Self-Care Instruction

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Guest Editor

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When asked to serve as guest editor of a supplement issue to the American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education (AJPE) on nonprescription medication therapy and self-care instruction, this author was elated. The idea of the supplement was conceptualized by Dr. Susan Meyer, then Senior Vice President of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, and Dr. Joseph DiPiro, Editor of AJPE, with the goal of providing a continuum of philosophies, thoughts, and ideas germane to nonprescription medicines and self-care education within the pharmacy curriculum. The supplement was also intended to provide guidance to faculty members in colleges and schools of pharmacy who have been charged with developing and delivering nonprescription medication therapy and self-care instruction within the pharmacy curriculum. With these “marching orders,” this guest editor proceeded to secure recognized self-care educators from the academy to help illuminate this important area of pharmacotherapy and patient care and its increasing emphasis in pharmacy practice. The result is a rich continuum of manuscripts that achieve the goal and intent of the series and demonstrate the critical need for students and practitioners to be knowledgeable and skilled with nonprescription medicines pharmacotherapy and self-care.

For the past 20 years, there has been mounting evidence of the need for increased emphasis on nonprescription medication therapy within the pharmacy curriculum. In his manuscript entitled, “Nonprescription Drug Therapy: Issues and Opportunities,” Dr. Timothy Covington highlights the significant expansion of nonprescription medication use and the high value that consumers place on nonprescription medications and diagnostic product use. Further, he illustrates how self-medicating patients frequently need assistance in selecting nonprescription drug products from a learned intermediary to assure appropriate self-care in conjunction with the patient’s total care regimen. Certainly, it is the pharmacist who is best prepared to do this. Because this emphasis in practice will continue to expand, it is incumbent upon colleges and schools of pharmacy to develop practice-relevant, competency-based, patient-centered curricula and continuing professional education opportunities that assure contemporary competence and intellectual proficiency in non-prescription medication therapy and self care. In addition, that knowledge and competency must be integrated holistically into the total mix of patient comorbidity and polypharmacy. Covington also promotes the concept that the pharmacist-assisted self-care business and professional practice model must be further facilitated by state and national pharmacy organizations, chain and independent community pharmacies, pharmacy wholesalers, and other stakeholders. He points out that recipients of pharmacy services await expanded and differentiated pharmacy-based, pharmacist-provided medication therapy management services focused upon the safe, appropriate, and effective selection, use, and monitoring of nonprescription medication therapy.

Matt Lee, PharmD, who is the Competency Assessment Senior Manager at the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy, has authored the manuscript, “Non-prescription Medicines and the North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination.” In his manuscript, Dr. Lee provides insights and an explanation for increasing the weight of nonprescription medicines and self-care within the North American Pharmacist Licensing Examination (NAPLEX) so there is equity in coverage across prescription and nonprescription medications. Dr. Lee illustrates how this important licensure examination undergoes periodic revision to maintain its currency with the demands and trends of contemporary pharmacy practice. The increased emphasis on nonprescription medications as a result of the most recent revision of the examination was in response to the growing variety of conditions for which nonprescription medications are available and the periodic switching of pharmaceutical products from prescription-only to nonprescription status. While the goal of pharmacy education is directed toward the practice of pharmacy rather than student success on the NAPLEX examination, the recognition of the importance of non-prescription medications to pharmacy practice by the Association responsible for licensure examination adds validity to increasing nonprescription medication therapy and self-care instruction within the pharmacy curriculum.

The manuscript authored by Dr. Seena Zierler-Brown et al entitled, “Current Status and Recommendations for Self-care Instruction in US Schools and Colleges of
Pharmacy 2006: A white paper,” provides recommendations for a broad structure of nonprescription medicines education and examples of a minimum standard for quality and quantity of related educational experiences across the curriculum. It also suggests various instructional strategies, course mechanics, course placement within the pharmacy curriculum, and student assessment methods.

In the manuscript entitled “Constructing a Self-care Curriculum,” Dr. Linda Krypel describes the challenges a changing marketplace presents for those designing a self-care curriculum. She points out that as manufacturers of self-care products seek to satisfy consumer demand and increase market shares, rapid changes occur with brand name extensions and prescription to nonprescription product switches. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed rulemaking and final monographs add to this changing environment. Thus, developing learning outcomes beyond drug knowledge becomes critical. Further, Dr. Krypel points out that learning outcomes must also address the multifaceted nature of self-care, including the development of skills in patient assessment (triage) and education. Determining which content areas should be included can be difficult when consumer demand and marketplace changes are considered. For example, consumer use of dietary and herbal supplements requires pharmacists to have basic knowledge of safety and efficacy regarding these products. Ultimately, given the dynamic, multifaceted nature of self-care, Dr. Krypel illustrates that pharmacist life-long learning may be the most important outcome necessary for a self-care curriculum.

Besides the plethora of nonprescription medications and self-care products on the US market, there are also a vast number of vitamins, herbals, dietary supplements, and homeopathic products available. However, few of these are accompanied by scientific evidence to support their use. In the manuscript entitled “Ethical, Scientific, and Educational Concerns With Unproven Medications,” Dr. Steven Pray provides his viewpoint on “quackery.” Quackery is defined as the promotion of products that do not work and was once a very common term used within the medical and pharmacy communities. However, with the advent of the 1994 Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act, many unproven natural products and dietary supplements were made commercially available with almost no FDA oversight. Coupled with the increasing national antiscientific climate and frequent product advertisements and articles in some professional pharmacy journals, these unproven entities appear to be gaining a foothold in self-care. Consequently, Dr. Pray points out how important it is for those who provide self-care instruction to resist pressure to present unproven therapies as realistic alternatives for medications with scientific proof of safety and effectiveness. Dr. Pray suggests that it is important to educate pharmacy students and pharmacists about these entities so they are able to credibly and knowledgably inform the consuming public, while advocating for evidence-based proof of safety and efficacy for those products that are available for patient use.

As the number of pharmacy colleges and schools continues to grow, there is an increasing need within the curriculum for additional faculty members. Typically now within the domain of pharmacy practice, new faculty members are recent graduates of residency programs and thus have only 1 year of postdoctoral education and skill development or are practicing pharmacists who have been “in the real world” for a number of years and have opted to become educators. Some in leadership positions within pharmacy colleges and schools may not place a high priority on self-care and nonprescription medication education and, therefore, the responsibility for educating students in this very important content area may fall to a new faculty member or a pharmacist practitioner. Suffice it to say, it is a daunting experience for a faculty member early in his or her career to be informed that he or she has been charged with teaching the nonprescription medications course. So, to help allay the fears of those who are charged with this important responsibility, Drs. Maria Sulli and Tara Whetsel provide their insights and experiences in the manuscript entitled, “Teaching Self-care as a Junior Faculty Member: Perspectives and Lessons Learned.” The manuscript presents the experiences of 2 junior faculty members who were charged with coordinating self-care instruction at their respective institutions. It discusses and shares the lessons learned regarding teaching self-care effectively when it is integrated across the pharmacy curriculum and when it is offered as a freestanding course.

It is extremely important to couple didactic education with actual application during practice experiences, including the advanced pharmacy practice experience (APPE), to demonstrate abilities and build confidence in the student. Providing an example of how this can be accomplished, in her manuscript “Engaging Students in Self-care Activities During an Advanced Community Pharmacy Practice Experience,” Dr. Lauren Angelo demonstrates her innovativeness and creativity as an educator. Her goal is to provide experiential rotation students with educational activities to enhance their learning and patient communication skills with respect to nonprescription medication therapy and self-care. She describes student creation of a consultation guide, a number of mini-projects, and a nonprescription pocket formulary assignment focusing on 4 specific disease states and their treatment options. The outcome demonstrated that
students were able to build upon what was learned during their didactic education. These activities also provided an excellent means of enhancing student patient-counseling and problem-solving skills. Additionally, Dr. Angelo relied on these activities to engage students in discussion pertaining to nonprescription products and self-care related issues.

Dr. Jan Hastings and colleagues describe one college of pharmacy’s approach to developing and implementing a nonprescription medication and self care APPE for all its students while creating a “win-win” scenario with volunteer preceptors. In their manuscript entitled, “Integrating an Elective Self-care Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience With a Required Advanced Pharmacy Practice Community Experience,” the authors share their strategy for providing this enriching experience for all of their students, given the constraints of available experiential education sites within Arkansas. Further, they provide valuable insights for engaging interested, dedicated pharmacy practitioners within their state when confronted with increasing student enrollment and the need for additional community-based APPEs.

Although the authors have worked hard and diligently to achieve the goal of this series and provide the philosophy and tools associated to conduct nonprescription medicines and self-care instruction coupled within the formal and experiential course work, they did not accomplish the goal of the series without help. This guest editor would be remiss if he did not acknowledge the numerous reviewers from the pharmacy academy who took valuable time to provide their nonprescription expertise in critiquing, providing insights, and evaluating these submissions. Although it is the authors who receive the credit for their contributions to the literature, their work is enhanced by the valuable contributions and suggestions of the reviewers. So, to the following reviewers, a big “thank you” from the guest editor for a job well done:

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