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Perspectives of Healthy Living Pharmacy (HLP) support staff on integration of public health activities into traditional pharmacy roles: A qualitative study

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Focal Points

- Qualitative exploration of integration of public health activity into traditional pharmacy roles from the perspective of pharmacy support staff in Healthy Living Pharmacies
- Integration of public health interventions was often described for activities at the medicines counter including product sales and healthcare advice, but little integration was mentioned for dispensary based activities
- There is potential for further integration of public health into day-to-day activities by pharmacy support staff

"...I'm a firm believer in that y'know, it's not gonna happen overnight. You're not gonna get somebody to sign up to a smoking cessation programme, an obesity programme, just like that from one word you've said. So to me it's not about just their first visit, it's about building up a rapport with somebody and y'know, talking to them erm, just even if it's just a few words one day and a bit longer the next day..."
Dispensing Assistant, Healthy Living Pharmacy Champion, Independent Pharmacy

Introduction

Community pharmacy has been acknowledged as a valuable and trusted public health resource¹, however in order for public health activity to be sustainable, it needs to be seen as integral to the role of a pharmacy. The aim of this study was to explore the views and attitudes of pharmacy support staff on the Health Living Pharmacy (HLP) initiative.

Methods

Face to face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 participants from 12 HLPs in Northumberland. HLP Champions (n=16) who had received Royal Society for Public Health training on understanding health improvement alongside non-champion staff (n=5) were included in the sample.

Participants were recruited by contacting pharmacists in HLPs who nominated support staff for potential participation. Informed consent was obtained prior to conducting interviews. A topic guide was developed and underwent face validity testing and piloting with one participant. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using Framework approach. The study was approved by Robert Gordon University ethics committee. NHS ethics approval was not required.

Table 1: Pharmacy ownership and locations of participants (n)

	Independent	Small chain	Regional chain	National multiple	Total
Village	1	2	0	3	6
Town and fringe	1	0	0	5	6
Suburban	0	0	0	0	0
Urban	0	0	0	0	0
Total	2	2	0	8	12

Table 2: Job roles of participants (n)

	HLP Champion	Non-HLP Champion	Total
Medicines Counter Assistant	6	3	9
Dispensing Assistant	6	0	6
Pharmacy Technician	3	1	4
Accuracy Checking Technician	1	1	2
Total	16	5	21

Results

One of the themes identified from the data was integration of public health activity into traditional pharmacy roles (see Table 3). Participants discussing integration of public health activities with other pharmacy duties included examples of advice when conducting product sales and responding to symptoms. An example participants often referred to was sales of nicotine replacement therapy.

"...nicorette lozenges or patches. Y'know, if they're buying anything like that. Or if they're kinda hovering around that area you go and approach them and, and ask them if they're interested in giving them up, or if they've tried before... Same with like er losing weight if they're sort of by the slimfast drinks and things. If you approach them and ask them if they need any help and take it from there and ask them." Non-Healthy Living Pharmacy Champion, Medicines Counter Assistant, National Multiple

Availability of in-pharmacy clinics was frequently described by participants as aiding integration.

"So, say if it's somebody continued buying nicotine replacement therapy, we would say that there are services available, had they thought about giving up." Healthy Living Pharmacy Champion, Medicines Counter Assistant, National Multiple

Participants also described examples of linking pharmacy sales with healthy eating advice, and advising patients about codeine dependence with requests for codeine-containing medicines. Many participants also expressed a perception that they were integrating public health activity subconsciously:

"...you don't realise that you are doing it. Because it's all part and parcel of the job." Healthy Living Pharmacy Champion, Medicines Counter Assistant, National Multiple

There was little in the data describing integration of public health activity with dispensing, though one participant did describe a diabetic foot care campaign where people with diabetes were identified from prescriptions they presented.

"...when I'm dispensing I don't think [being a healthy living pharmacy] makes a huge amount of difference." Healthy Living Pharmacy Champion, Dispensing Assistant, Independent

Another form of integration from dispensing that a couple of respondents described was clients browsing health promotion materials within the pharmacy when waiting for their prescriptions. Health promotion materials were widely described as a facilitator for interventions including alcohol awareness, sexual health, cancer screening and cardiovascular health.

"We've had one guy who's discovered that he has prostate cancer because we did a cancer campaign and he picked up some leaflets..." Healthy Living Pharmacy Champion, Dispensing Assistant, National Multiple

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Table 3: Breakdown of 'Integration' theme

Parent theme	Sub-themes
Integration of public health activity with other day-to-day responsibilities	Over-the-counter sales
	Dispensing activity
	Perceived subconscious integration
	Responding to symptoms

Discussion

Whilst participants in this study described integration of public health advice for some pharmacy roles seamlessly, participants were less able to describe integration into dispensing activity despite opportunity in areas such as diabetes and cardiovascular health. Contextualisation of public health activity within community pharmacies for support staff could enable further integration of public health into the role of community pharmacy. Facilitators from achieving this integration for medicines counter activities should be explored to inform better integration of public health into dispensary based activities.

Northumberland
Northumberland County Council

North of Tyne
Local Pharmaceutical Committee

References

1. Department of Health 2010 White Paper Healthy Lives Healthy People. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/healthy-lives-healthy-people-our-strategy-for-public-health-in-england> (Accessed 13/04/14)