An e-Delphi study to develop best-practices for opioid safety in community pharmacy settings

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Introduction:

The prescribing and supply of opioids have increased in Australia, U.S., and Canada in recent decades, with corresponding increases in prescription opioid-related harms. For people prescribed opioids, community pharmacies offer an accessible, regular point-of-contact and pharmacy settings provide a unique opportunity to address prescription opioid risks. This project aimed to develop consensus-based, best practice statements for increasing the safe use of prescription opioids through community pharmacy settings.

Methods:

The e-Delphi technique is used to obtain consensus from experts about issues where no conclusive evidence is available, using multiple rounds of online participation. Potential participants with relevant expertise were identified by the investigator group, invited to the study, and asked to identify other experts for invitation, using a snowball sampling technique. The e-Delphi process was completed through three online rounds, involving (1) statement idea generation, (2) developing statement consensus, and (3) confirming and ranking statements.

Results:
Forty-two experts, including academics, pharmacists and prescribers from six countries participated. Eighty-five statements were initially developed; 78 were supported with amendments, with suggestions to merge and remove some items in Round 2, resulting in 72 final statements which were all endorsed in Round 3. Items spanned seven themes: education, monitoring outcomes and risk, deprescribing and pain management, overdose education and naloxone, opioid agonist treatment (OAT), staff education, and cross-cutting practices. Preferred terminology and definitions were identified in Round 2 and confirmed in Round 3.

Discussions and Conclusions:
Community pharmacies offer a unique opportunity to improve the safety of prescription opioid use. These best practice statements were developed using consensus-based expert opinions, to provide practical guidance and recommendations for pharmacists to increase community safety, better support people prescribed opioids, and reduce opioid-related harms.

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