

The Pharmacist and Quality of Patient Care

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Pharmaceutical care essentially is the acceptance of a social responsibility for the healthcare needs of an individual patient by a pharmacist. It is patient-centric and outcomes oriented. Its primary objectives are to promote health, to prevent disease and to assess, monitor, initiate and modify medication use to ensure that drug therapy regimens are safe and effective for the patient. It is the responsible provision of drug therapy for the purpose of achieving definite health related outcomes that improve a patient's quality of life.

As medical advances have led to cures and improved treatments of disease and delayed mortality, it is logical for a pharmacist to be involved in not only saving lives but also in terms of improving the quality of patients' lives.

Quality of life then becomes an important tool in addition to the traditional outcomes of health such as mortality and morbidity. It reflects an increased appreciation for not only how long a person lives, but also on how well he lives.

Understanding how a patient's disease affects his/her Quality of Life is an important part of the patient-healthcare provider relationship of which the pharmacist is an integral part. The goal of healthcare should be to confer and to ensure a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, a state of ease and not merely the absence of disease.

Until a few years ago, the medical model of healthcare involved the approach of taking the medical history and examination of the patient, followed by investigations and treatment. The success of this model was determined by the clinical measures of outcomes at the end of treatment. This model was deficient in determining the patient's perspective of the outcome, in that it failed to discern whether the health needs of the patient had been met, and if the healthcare process was satisfactory and if the disease burden on the patient's Quality of Life had been reduced.

The challenges in determining and quantifying quality of life and more specifically health related quality of life is that it involves several parameters and variables which differ in a myriad ways. The impact of a disease



Dr. Githa Kishore

on an individual is based on several factors, such as, his socioeconomic background, the severity of the disease, on his family and social support system, on his mental status and his own coping mechanism, his fears (both real and imagined) of the future, among several others.

Rarely does one health measure encompass all these factors and hence researchers and healthcare providers are required to use many different measurement tools to assess the quality of care provided to patients in different settings. In the field of healthcare practice, subjective and objective assessments are used to evaluate patient care. These include the use of generic instruments or disease / function specific instruments which have several applications and limitations which are well documented in the literature. The use of these validated and reliable instruments by pharmaceutical firms, clinical trials, hospitals and by healthcare professionals is indicative of their importance. However the large variety of generic and disease specific instruments available can lead to researchers and practitioners pondering over which one would be the most appropriate one to use in a particular setting. Usually it has been recommended that the use of a combination of generic and

disease specific questionnaires would provide complementary information. Such data would also help in planning and implementing health policies at the local and the national levels. Improving quality of care requires a focus on governance issues, building institutional capacity and in promoting a culture of data driven policies.

The paradigm shift of healthcare outcomes from the physiological parameters-dictated outcomes to include patient wellbeing requires the practicing pharmacist to also become aware of these changing drivers of patient care. Hence the concept of pharmaceutical care, of which quality of life of the patient is an important tool, requires taking a centre stage in the profession and practice of pharmacy. The need of the hour is for pharmacists to become aware that patients require holistic care rather than just medication utilization services and information in disease specific situations. Quality of health care should encompass cost-effective, safe, patient-centric care which is timely, equitable, efficient and effective. These attributes need to be included in all aspects of pharmaceutical care. Thus the opportunities for pharmacists to include efficient patient care measures as a part of their service is immense. Reimbursement policies to incentivize these services will require legislations and new financial models to be permitted by law by the policy makers.

There is a growing need to sensitize our future pharmacists to the importance of understanding a patient's perceptions of medications and disease. The pharmacists' care services should comprise of all aspects of medication therapy management and pharmaceutical care. Pharmacists' participation in patient care results in a proven decrease in adverse reaction events, lesser number of medication errors and also improves patient compliance with drug regimens. They also play an important role in preventive care services and in education and counseling services. Through efficient pharmacist-patient care services, the contributions made by pharmacists in healthcare will become increasingly invaluable and recognized by the public at large as an important paradigm in healthcare.

This specialty service rendered by an innovative and responsible pharmacist is the need of the hour as it will add to the society's perspective of a caring pharmacist.

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