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Title

Understanding perceptions of the safety of prescription medication sharing: a qualitative study with members of the public

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Prescribing and pharmacotherapeutics

Presenters

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Abstract

Context

Prescription medication sharing involves giving and using of medicine(s) prescribed for someone else. It is a form of inappropriate medication use; when not taken correctly, prescription medicines can cause harm. There is limited qualitative research exploring non-recreational prescription medication sharing behaviours from the patient's perspective.

Objective

To explore UK patient experiences and beliefs about prescription medication sharing behaviour, alongside their perceptions of the safety of these practices.

Study Design and Analysis

Semi structured interviews were conducted with members of the public who previously participated in a quantitative telephone survey and reported sharing prescription medication in the last 12 months. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically using an inductive approach.

Setting

Participants from across England of varying age, gender, education and ethnicity, engaged in medication sharing practices were interviewed.

Results

A total of 29 people participated. Four key themes were identified: 1) Access to services; 2) Availability/Convenience; 3) Rational decision making, 4) Safeguarding.

To summarise, people highlighted challenges to accessing services leading to medication sharing. Surplus prescription medication was commonly available in people's homes. Participants valued UK NHS resources and expressed a desire not to waste prescription medication and found ways to be resourceful through medication sharing. They rationalised their decisions to share medication by incorporating risk assessment strategies to gauge whether it was safe to loan medication to others with similar diagnoses and symptoms. Participants also discussed the role of public health campaigns, dispensing pharmacists and prescribers in educating patients.

Conclusions

This is the first UK study to investigate public perceptions of the safety of prescription medication sharing. Findings will identify beliefs and situational factors that influence these perceptions and contribute to developing potential solutions so that better safeguarding measures are in place to mitigate unsafe medication sharing practices and dispel misconceptions.

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