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A qualitative evaluation of the attitudes, barriers, and facilitators relating to the provision of vaccine information by Irish Community Pharmacists

Ms. Deirdre Quigley, Dr Kevin Murphy

School of Pharmacy, University College Cork (UCC)

A TRADITION OF INDEPENDENT THINKING

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Background

- "*Vaccination is considered to be one of the greatest achievements of public health*" (1)

- In recent years, some vaccination rates have declined
  - Ireland: Polio 92.1% (2014) -> 87.9% (2020)
  - England: MMR 92.7% (14/15) -> 90.3% (20/21)
  - Latin America and Caribbean: Hib 89% (2014) -> 76% (2020)
  - East Asia and Pacific: Polio 95% (2014) -> 91% (2020)

Vaccine Hesitancy

- Vaccine hesitancy is the "*delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite availability of vaccination services*." (2)

- Influenced by contextual, individual, group, and vaccine-specific factors (3)

- Identified by the WHO in 2019 as one of "ten threats to global health" (4)
  - "*Health workers, especially those in communities, remain the most trusted advisor and influencer of vaccination decisions*"

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Pharmacists & Vaccination

- Pharmacist counselling and education can increase vaccination acceptance by approx. one quarter (5, 6)

  "*…strategies involving immediate and direct communication between the pharmacist and patient largely contributed to the increase in vaccination rates.*"

- Pharmacists are more accessible and have experience encouraging medication adherence (7)

- Many pharmacists reluctant to engage in vaccine counselling due to their perception of the value of vaccination, confidence in vaccine safety and efficacy, and in their own vaccine knowledge (8-11)

Aims

Explore the factors that contribute to Community Pharmacists' attitudes to providing information on vaccination





Identify actions that can improve vaccination counselling by Community Pharmacists

Data Collection & Analysis

- Demographic data
  - Location
  - Pharmacy type
  - Pharmacist role
  - Pharmacy support
  - Vaccination-related questions
- Questionnaire
  - Beliefs about vaccination
- Topic guide
  - Personal attitudes about vaccination
  - Pharmacists as vaccine educators
  - Influences on willingness to counsel
- Analysis
  - Thematic analysis
  - NVivo 12

Demographic Data (n=12)

1	Gender	n	%
	Female	10	83.3
	Male	2	16.7

2	Pharmacy location	n	%
	Rural	2	41.7
	Urban	10	33.3

3	Pharmacy type	n	%
	Independent	4	33.3
	Small chain	2	16.7
	Medium chain	3	25.0
	Large chain	3	25.0

4	Role	n	%
	Supervising pharmacist	6	50
	Support pharmacist	2	16.7
	Locum	2	16.7
	Managing supervising pharmacist	1	8.3
	Superintendent pharmacist	1	8.3

5	Number of pharmacists	n*	%
	1	9	90.0
	2	1	10.0

6	Number of technicians	n*	%
	0	3	30.0
	1	5	50.0
	2	1	10.0
	3	1	10.0

7	Vaccine administration	n	%
	Never	1	8.3
	Previous – flu	1	8.3
	Current – flu	9	75.0
	Current – flu + other	1	8.3

8	Number of flu vaccines received in past 5 seasons	n*	%
	1	2	20.0
	2	1	10.0
	3	2	20.0
	4	1	10.0
	5	4	40.0

* 2 respondents declined to answer

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Questionnaire (n=10)

STATEMENT	CD	MD	SD	NDA	SA	MA	CA
Vaccines play an important role in public health	0	0	0	0	0	1	9
Vaccines are safe	0	0	0	1	0	3	6
Vaccines are effective	0	0	0	0	1	4	5
I have a thorough knowledge about vaccinations, including the risks and benefits	0	0	1	0	3	5	1
I feel comfortable when providing information about vaccines to patients	0	0	1	0	4	4	1
Pharmacists have an important role to play in improving public vaccine uptake	0	0	0	0	1	3	6
Pharmacists have a duty to attempt to improve public vaccine uptake	0	0	0	1	1	4	4
Providing vaccine counselling to patients is a valuable use of my time	0	0	0	1	1	2	6

CD - Completely disagree; MD - Mostly disagree; SD – Somewhat disagree; NDA – Neither Disagree nor Agree; SA – Somewhat Agree; MA – Mostly Agree; CA – Completely Agree

Findings

Vaccine values and confidence

Influence and duty

Knowledge

Time and money

Supporting resources

Public awareness

Vaccine values and confidence

- Participants all acknowledged the positive value of vaccination

"not even just to protect yourself but to protect other people as well, the more vulnerable patients. If you have a fairly decent uptake of a vaccine, it's going to spiral on to protect a lot of people." P3

"I don't believe that they're a hundred percent effective, but I do believe that the level of effectiveness is to such a high degree it will have dramatic effect in terms of transmission and protecting the vulnerable population." P11

- Though not perfect, vaccines worked well enough to be effective

- Trust in safeguards for vaccine safety was sufficient for most but for some fears persisted

"Even though I'm a pharmacist, I understand the science of it, I agree with the science of it, I trust the science of it, but I think when you hear stories of vaccine-induced injuries it sows a little seed of doubt and a little seed of fear in me…" P12

Influence and duty

- Participants believed pharmacists could influence patients' vaccination actions

"they are just looking for the final bit of reassurance… borderline but leaning a particular way already." P1

"I'm only speaking about flu vaccines cos that's all I'm informed about so I wouldn't know how to challenge someone who had a fear of the HPV vaccine. I wouldn't be able to reassure her or him about their kids." P8

"I don't think it's our place to persuade somebody. We've a duty of care to inform, provide correct information, and advise, but to persuade is something different." P4

- Majority of participants did not feel that they should proactively encourage vaccination

Knowledge

- Knowledge about vaccines varied enormously from vaccine to vaccine

"I would only be confident in saying or giving information about a vaccine that I knew the information about." P5

"if you're going to be dispensing a vaccine you need to know about it. Like you need to know about any product you're dispensing." P3

I do feel that if it's published from the pharmaceutical company, it has to be reliable and it has to be truthful." P8

"I would trust most of the information on the HSE website… You have to weigh up that it's obviously going to be promoting vaccines." P3

- Most trusted government and pharmaceutical industry information sources on vaccines

Time and money

- Lack of time was one of the biggest barriers to vaccine counselling

"it's difficult to do because there's so much other work to do as well. I think it's really important. But it's hard to find the time to give it your all." P11

"I guess time is the big thing. If you'd a queue of people waiting for you to get prescriptions, they would tend to be priority." P6

"every other profession, if you go and ask for advice, whether you agree with the advice or you don't, you pay for that advice." P9

"if you're not the administrator of that vaccine it's a totally and utterly unremunerated thing." P10

- Cost of staff training and opportunity cost of time spent providing advice makes vaccine counselling expensive

Supporting resources

- Professionally-made supporting material assisted pharmacists and patients

"I think if you have some source of information from a reliable source, HSE leaflets for example, I would be very confident in going through the leaflet with them, going through risks, benefits, side-effects. In that case when there's something tangible to show them it's not just me saying it." P12

"if there was one central place where you could put in the vaccine and it gave you the top-line information. That would be handy. It would be easier then to reassure people…" P7

- Participants saw need for pharmacist-targeted information

- Interactive training on vaccine counselling would be the preferred method

"there's a whole psychology of how to speak to people about it… how to change minds and how to show people who are reluctant your point of view. That requires training as well because that's not a straightforward conversation." P12

Public awareness

- Bringing vaccination into public consciousness would benefit patients and pharmacists

"it's like the more it seeps into their consciousness and their sense of awareness, that they'll have conversations about it with their friends, with their family, when they're in the pharmacy..." P9

"More awareness, more of those ads, television ads or even ads that would pop up on your phone or Instagram, Facebook, et cetera, where the person themselves could have a bit of information when they come into talk to you. That you don't just have to look up flu vaccine, say, from the internet and god only knows where you'd go then. It's just very easy to find the right resources." P3

Discussion

- Further research on pharmacist concerns
- Provision of supporting resources
- Public awareness campaigns
- Financial reimbursement

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