



REVIEW

Patient’s medicinal knowledge in Saudi Arabia: Are we doing well?



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Abstract Patient education is one of the main factors of patient therapeutic plan and without it, the patient may not benefit from his/her medications. Several studies showed the effectiveness of educating patients about their disease(s) and their medication(s) which ultimately enhance their quality of life especially in chronic diseases such as diabetes mellitus and hypertension. Concept of patient education is well known and understood in the Western countries while in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia it is not well established despite some efforts made by few big hospitals. In Saudi Arabia, different stakeholders such as hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, healthcare professionals, health societies and association and governmental agencies do not do their job as patient education. Aim of this paper was to throw some light about the current situation in Saudi Arabia.

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One of the important fundamentals in the world of health and medicine is the knowledge and the awareness of the patient of their illness and medications. This is known as “general health knowledge” as this term is the most used term in the scientifically and medically developed and advanced countries all over the world. Moreover, the patient should be part of his or her medical plan (Weed, 1997). Nonetheless, unfortunately, this concept was not fully focused on or largely applied in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia except for a few limited applications established only by the famous and large hospitals in

the country, namely those who have counseling services (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2012; Alkatheri and Albekairy, 2013). Patient awareness or knowledge is considered the first pillar of the treatment process. Not only does this include his or her understanding of the drugs, but also includes other aspects of care such as a full understanding of the disease(s) the patient suffers from, and disease prevention precautions (Stromberg, 2005).

The terms awareness and knowledge in health are not different from other forms of life knowledge including business and family affairs; however, health awareness and knowledge should be the priority as they affect all activities in the patient's life. One example of the patient's awareness is his or her understanding of the important role of physical activities and exercise (such as walking, jogging or swimming) in the prevention of several chronic illnesses including preventing obesity, which is well-known in its relationship of triggering such additional chronic illnesses including diabetes and cardiovascular diseases (Bassuk and Manson, 2005; Stromberg, 2005; Vanhees et al., 2012).

One of the pillars of health awareness is medicinal education so that the patient is fully knowledgeable about all his or her dispensed medications and also the necessary instructions for the proper use of such medications (Micheli et al., 2007). In countries such as Canada, one can find that the majority of the population has general knowledge about the medications and they seek further information about the medication they use for conditions they have; thus, defining what we mean by the term medicinal education or knowledge (Guenette and Moisan, 2011). For example, most of the cold, cough and allergy medications are sold over the counter in pharmacies and other shopping centers so patients can go and buy what they need in case they have cold or allergy or other mild disease. Further, with the new technology and new methods that are used by pharmaceutical companies such as direct to consumer advertisement (DTC), the patient would know or guess the diagnosis of his/her illness and know the appropriate medications he or she would need for his or her condition (Wilkes et al., 2000). Around 75% of the patients, they received the medications that they tell the physician about them for their condition (APA, 1997). One can find the patients, and people in general, in the Western countries are keen to know about the medication they use and that in general, they discuss the information they obtain with their physicians (Wilkes et al., 2000). In addition to the eagerness of the patients to gather information from different resources, internet access has helped tremendously to provide necessary information about diseases, medications for treatment, and alternatives forms of care strategies (Ilic, 2010). Studies have shown that patient education regarding medications leads to the commitment of the patient to drug therapy manifested by proper use of the drugs which will eventually lead to full benefit from medications and thus, curing the patients as well as maintaining good health to perform daily life activities (Abbott, 1998; Shah and Abu-Amara, 2013).

This does not mean that there are differences in the level of general education between the patients of the Western countries and those of Saudi Arabia. However, the problem lies with health care professionals (e.g., physicians, pharmacists, and nurses) as they do not allocate enough time to discuss the medications they prescribe with their patients; additionally, they even do not provide detailed information about the

diseases which the patients suffer from. In general, most of the patients seek extensive information about their diseases and the prescribed medications, as such, it is crucial that health care professionals become proactive and allocate enough time to discuss medications, the expected therapeutic outcomes and the side effects with every patient. In addition, hospitals should contain specialized centers where health care professionals, especially pharmacists, can provide patient counseling and answer patients' inquiries.

The information that general type of patients need is very important to know and be educated about them. However, patients with serious and severe disease need for more detailed education because it is crucial for those patients' life. For instant, kidney disease, organ transplants, cancer, diabetic depressed and cardiovascular patients are in need of specific counseling and education about their disease and how to use their medications; this education process should be frequent (Clowers-Webb et al., 2006; Ellis et al., 2004; Johnston et al., 1999; Robinson et al., 1997; Wilson et al., 2012). In the case of patients with a liver or renal transplant, the healthcare professionals need to spend more time discussing the importance of taking medications on time, not missing the dose of immunosuppressant, their life styles and other habits (Chisholm et al., 2001).

We should not ignore the important role as patient education that should be done by higher government agencies such that is the Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA) and the Ministry of Health in medically educating patients, as they always should make efforts in this prospective. We hope they start the efforts and increase such efforts with more and more campaigns so that more and more patients are being reached and educated.

It is important that health associations and societies should activate and increase their role and efforts in educating patients in general health and specifically medicinal education. Also, the role of community pharmacies in educating patients is very important as a large percentage of the patients go directly to the pharmacies to obtain their medications. Thus, the active role of pharmacies would be effective in educating patients about medications. One of the main issues that Saudi patients are not getting the benefit from, in respect to patient education, is the role of pharmaceutical companies to conduct educational campaigns for the public. Most of the big pharmaceutical companies have interests in Saudi markets; there are over 15 local pharmaceutical companies, and these pharmaceutical companies do not do a good job as a role and mission toward educating the Saudi population about either diseases or even their own medicinal products. On the other hand, these companies are very active in promoting medications to the healthcare professionals (HCPs) especially physicians. In addition, these companies would do campaigns, lectures, symposiums and sometimes send HCPs outside the country to attend meetings and conferences related to their medicinal products. The cost of the aforementioned activities conducted by pharmaceutical companies for HCPs would cost way more than the cost of campaigns for the public and the patients specifically. Therefore, companies should play a major role here.

In the United States, there is a type of activity that usually shared by pharmaceutical companies and media through their different ways, which is the direct to consumer (DTC) advertisement to advertise their medications. This activity could be

considered as patient education source; however, some experts are against DTC advertisement because it might not give the full information about the drug especially the adverse drug reactions (Wilkes et al., 2000). In Saudi Arabia, this method is not utilized well for the purpose of patient education, as the SFDA do not control it well despite their efforts.

The media play a significant role in this prospective as they could provide awareness and educational campaigns to the public via radio and visual media. As media reach a large percentage of the population, this would make it suitable for delivering those messages. Further, Saudi hospitals, clinics or societies in Saudi Arabia publish few educational websites in the Arabic language. However, there is some effort being made by some big governments and private hospitals but there is not enough campaign to raise awareness among patients regarding the use of these websites and how to benefit from them. On the other hand, several studies found many educational Web site in the English language; these are considered a rich source for the patients who used them for educational purposes (Diaz et al., 2002; Eysenbach et al., 2002; Miller et al., 2013).

Even though someone would consider medicinal knowledge a minor topic, the actual fact is that medicinal knowledge is the first and most important step in treating the patients and it would avoid and prevent the occurrence of multiple health problems that would have been caused by limited education of the patients. Therefore, all stakeholders in Saudi Arabia (i.e., hospitals, healthcare professionals, health professional societies, health government agencies, media and pharmaceutical companies) should have a role in educating and enhancing patient's knowledge with respect to their disease and medications and each of the stakeholders has a unique role based on their experiences and field.

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