



NEWS

THREE WAYS TO SOLVE THE BIGGEST FIXABLE PROBLEM IN HEALTH CARE



VANESSA LONTOS — 10/05/2017

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One of Australia's biggest problems is a huge opportunity for pharmacy to help, writes Vanessa Lontos

Medicines are the most common treatment used in health care and contribute to significant improvements when used appropriately.¹

However, misuse of medicines can also be a cause of harm and be associated with more adverse events than any other aspect of health care.

In 2013 the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in

Healthcare prepared a review of medication safety in Australia and revealed that the annual cost of medication related hospital admissions is \$1.2billion. It also stated that the prevalence of medication errors is of concern because the majority of these errors are considered preventable².

This makes medication non-adherence (or not taking medicines properly) the biggest fixable problem in healthcare.³

Preventing adverse medication events is complex and requires strategy at many levels within the health system. The different, and often siloed areas within the health system that individual patients can access, make this problem inherently difficult to solve.

However, it is estimated that on average, there are more than 14 visits to a community pharmacy per year for each man, woman and child in Australia.⁴

In addition, community pharmacies dispense more than 297 million prescriptions annually.⁵

Therefore, we could assume, that although the individual journey of each patient within the health system varies, it is very likely they are accessing medications and therefore the pharmacy, each time they are accessing health care.

At the risk of sounding optimistic, I see a wonderful opportunity and responsibility here for us as pharmacists.

How can you do your part in helping prevent this huge challenge facing our health system? Here are three tips:

Be Accessible. According to data provided by The Next Level, as an industry average, pharmacists are involved in prescription processing 56% of the time.

By not being accessible we are potentially contributing to a problem we are uniquely placed to help prevent. Developing systems and processes within our dispensaries to free up the pharmacist's time is a key enabler toward building accessibility.

Accessibility allows you to positively influence the patient's experience and promote better outcomes for their medicines.

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Engage your patients. Patient engagement has become a

focus in healthcare globally and while research is in its infancy, has grown exponentially since 2002. The growing evidence has shown that when a patient is engaged by their health professionals and more engaged in their own health they achieve better care, improved health outcomes and incur lower health costs.

The questions you ask are at the heart of engagement. Deepening your understanding and knowledge of different health conditions can help you expand your engagement and questioning skills.

For example, next time you are handing out a repeat for Effexor, instead of asking "How are you going?" ask "What have you noticed that is different or better since starting this medicine?"

Your questions hold the key to unlocking potential and preventable problems.

Believe in the difference you can make. We often focus on the day to day needs within our own businesses that we forget the impact we can make.

Building medication safety begins with improving patient skills, confidence and understanding of their medicines. Working with the patient to solve little problems can go a long way to preventing them becoming bigger ones. Every conversation counts.

Next time you are at the frontline of our biggest fixable problem in healthcare – what will you do?

References

- (1) Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (2013), Literature Review: Medication Safety in Australia. ACSQHC, Sydney. Page: 6
- (2) Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (2013), Literature Review: Medication Safety in Australia. ACSQHC, Sydney page: 6
- (3) Dr Rajiv Shah TedxFargo You Tube (2015 October 26th)
"The New Disruptors in Healthcare – Patient and

Pharmacists”

(4) The Pharmacy Guild of Australia Fact Sheet: Serving Australians: A system of community pharmacy May 2016

(5) The Pharmacy Guild of Australia Fact Sheet: Serving Australians: A system of community pharmacy May 2016

Vanessa qualified as a pharmacist in 2002 from Monash University, and has over 14 years' experience in community pharmacy, including being a pharmacy owner and pharmacy consultant. Vanessa is passionate about upskilling pharmacists in areas of patient engagement to improve the patient experience and promote better health outcomes in community pharmacy. Vanessa is currently implementing the LEAPP Dispensary Excellence program across the Sigma pharmacy network. In its inaugural year, The LEAPP Program was launched at the Retail Conference in March this year. Vanessa is Sigma's Dispensary Learning and Development Specialist.

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