



Pre-registration Pharmacists' perspectives on recommending health and wellbeing apps to patients.

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Tap to view

A health and wellbeing (HW) app is a smartphone application, used to promote and support a healthy lifestyle by managing or preventing disease, providing health information or encouraging users to take part in activities to take care of their physical and mental wellbeing.¹⁻⁴

Pharmacists not only dispense medications but lifestyle advice as well, and HW apps are one resource to offer patients.

HW apps have benefits in increasing disease awareness, providing motivation for behaviour change and promoting preventative behaviours and self-care.⁵⁻⁷ However, a lack of awareness, guidance and endorsement are forming barriers to their recommendations by pharmacists.^{8,9}

The knowledge and perspectives of pre-registration pharmacists on HW app recommendations are unknown.

Introduction

This study aimed to investigate the current experience pre-registration pharmacists have of HW apps and explore their perspectives of recommending HW apps.

Objectives:

- To explore the experiences of pre-registration pharmacists of HW apps, and instances where they have recommended apps.
- Identify the perspectives of pre-registration pharmacists towards use of HW apps by patients and explore barriers and facilitators to use.
- Determine and explore the factors that would influence pre-registration pharmacists recommending HW apps.

Aim and Objectives

A qualitative approach was taken using semi-structured interviews with pre-registration pharmacists. Ethical approval was received from Newcastle University (5904/2020).

Participant recruitment was carried out via social media and distribution amongst professional networks. An online participant information sheet and consent form were utilised and a ten item semi-structured interview guide was developed and used.

A thematic, inductive approach to data analysis was taken. Braun and Clarke's¹⁰ six step method of thematic analysis was followed which included; data familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report.

Methods

Eight semi-structured interviews were carried out remotely in autumn 2020, interviews ranged from 15 - 26 minutes in length (average 20.5 minutes).

Three themes were identified from the data suggesting the pivotal influencers to pre-registration pharmacists' recommendations of HW apps are a mixture of:

- patient specific factors that determine whether a patient would use the app;
- the design and usability of the apps,
- the pharmacists' and pre-registration pharmacists' perceptions of their role in giving lifestyle advice and recommending HW apps.

Results

"Anything that puts patients in a position to make decisions about their own health is really, really great" (P3).

The lack awareness of HW apps by pharmacists and pre-registration pharmacists is currently restricting their recommendations.¹¹ There are concerns about the quality, usability, data protection and accuracy of apps that need to be addressed to increase the use and recommendation of HW apps.^{12,13} The implementation of a quality assurance framework for the development of HW apps could enable this.

The participants felt there may be potential dangers to apps if used without appropriate training or supervision and expressed scenarios in which using a HW app could have a detrimental affects.

Apps: the good, the bad and the ugly

"I think you've got to be careful that what you're giving is actually correct. There is a potential that you're going to give information that's not right...I think there's ways of asking questions that you might be better at, as a pharmacist." (P2).

The participants felt the need to use apps before they recommend them and control the content patients can access. This paternalistic approach is a barrier in implementing autonomy due to the expression of superiority of the HCP to review the apps and overprotection of patients.^{14,15}

Clearer guidance from policy makers such as the GPhC around the role of pharmacists in technology recommendations would be useful.

The role of the pharmacist

"For the future of pharmacy, I believe that as the generations go by people are going to have more access to smartphones and apps are definitely going to be something that's going to be developed further." (P8).

Participants recognised the individuality of patients and the many factors that influence their use of technology, as well as personal experiences and professional scenarios. A common idea being that age affects technology use, however the support the individual receives and their personal motivation for behaviour change were also influential.¹⁶

There is disconnect between the recognised benefits and patient-centredness of apps and the participants wanting to control access and make judgement if apps are appropriate for certain patients.

Patients are people too

Pre-registration pharmacists perceived HW apps to have benefits to patients including enabling autonomy and providing motivation to initiate behaviour change. However, there was a lack of awareness regarding the availability of HW apps and varying involvement in providing lifestyle advice.

Some pre-registration pharmacists do not perceive a role in lifestyle advice, and demonstrated a desire to assert control over patient resources contradicting their idea that apps enable patient autonomy.

Other barriers were quality and accuracy concerns and even damage from apps being competitive.

In the future, with the increased technology and lessening of barriers, pre-registration pharmacists believe HW apps will have a greater role in supporting patient care.

Conclusion

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