

Developing a yearly national skills enhancement initiative on OTCs in Norwegian pharmacies

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Introduction:

Representatives from the Norwegian Pharmacy Association (NPA), the three vertically integrated pharmacy chains, the hospital pharmacies, and Norway's National Centre for Development of Pharmacy Practice; Apokus, meet regularly in an “over-the-counter medicine (OTC)” working group. The aim is to enable pharmacy employees to give the best professional customer advice on appropriate use of OTCs. In 2022, the working group decided to develop a yearly national skills enhancement initiative. The purpose of the initiative is to empower customers to make appropriate choices on the use of OTCs in self-care. The project aims to achieve this by strengthening the communication skills of pharmacy employees, enabling them to engage in dialogue, explore issues and provide customized advice.

Method:

The working group first selects an OTC for which they want the pharmacy employees to enhance their communication skills when providing advice. Then they ask Apokus to develop a training program for this purpose. A promotional plan is made to increase the probability that as many employees as possible collectively complete the training.

Results:

A yearly national skills enhancement initiative on OTCs is successfully established. The training program includes 30 minutes e-learning about the chosen OTC(s) and the symptom(s)/diagnosis(es)/customer group(s) and 30 minutes practical training on communication skills. The practical training is either done alone using interactive, scenario-based learning or in person with colleagues.

These initiatives have so far been completed/started:

1. “Young customer” – The aim was to provide better knowledge about the growing misuse of OTC-analgesics like paracetamol among adolescents, and how to engage with this customer group.
2. “Stuffy nose” (nasal congestion) – The aim was to provide better knowledge about abuse of nasal decongestants, and how to engage in dialog to identify and support this customer group, as well as prevent addiction from occurring.
3. “Sluggish bowels” (constipation) – The aim is to provide better knowledge about which of OTCs are best suited for different types of constipation, and how to initiate dialogue about topics known to be embarrassing and stigmatized.

The employees report (satisfaction survey) that they appreciate the national approach, as they most often only engage in activities in their own pharmacy chain. They also find the structure and content of the e-learning very satisfying, especially the interactive, scenario-based learning.

Conclusion:

In 2022, Norwegian pharmacies, the NPA, and Apokus managed to implement a yearly national skills enhancement initiative aiming to empower customers to make appropriate choices on the use of OTCs in self-care. This is done through collectively enhancing the communication competencies of all pharmacy employees advising customers on the appropriate use of selected OTCs. The pharmacy employees find the initiative very satisfying. Despite being competitors, Norwegian pharmacy owners have a unique professional collaboration.