Study of self-medication in students belonging to the area of Economic-Administrative Sciences of the Universidad Autónoma de Nayarit

Estudio de automedicación en estudiantes pertenecientes al área de Ciencias Económico-Administrativas de la Universidad Autónoma de Nayarit

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Introduction

Self-medication has been defined as "the use of medicines without a doctor's prescription". This definition indirectly places a heavy responsibility on the community pharmacist. Two situations can occur:

A.   When the user asks the pharmacist what he/she gives him/her for a symptomatology.
B.   When he/she directly asks for a specific medicine

Taking these two situations into account, self-medication could be considered as the use of medicines that has neither been indicated nor supervised by a health professional. There is another definition of self-medication as "the treatment of self-observed symptoms with over-the-counter medicines. This definition does not take into account the fact that citizens also self-medicate with products that legally require a prescription, and that are for example in family medicine cabinets from previous prescriptions.

Self-medication is a practice that is misguided by marketing and without permanent monitoring by drug regulatory authorities, which can cause serious damage to the health of the individual, the family and the community. The risks of self-medication occur mainly when the patient consumes prescription medicines that are sold freely. For this reason, it is important to know and study this behaviour in our social environment, so that problems can be identified and therefore strategies can be designed to improve the conditions that require it.

The study of the practice of self-medication in the university community is of great interest for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, because students will be the most qualified professionals in the future and will possibly exert a certain influence at all levels of their environment, not only professionally but also socially and culturally. Secondly, because the university environment offers multiple possibilities, from the academic and extra-academic sphere, to propose and carry out training, educational, informative and informative actions on the issue of self-medication.

Summary. Self-medication is a public health problem, to which a series of complications are related, such as: misdiagnosis of the disease, appearance of adverse effects, prolongation or aggravation of the disease, resistance to the drugs used, which is why it is necessary to know the true magnitude of this problem at a local level. For this reason, the objective was to find out about the behaviours related to the habit and practice of self-medication among university students, its factors, circumstances and implications, as well as their perception of it.

To achieve this, a cross-sectional study was carried out among the university population in the area of economic-administrative sciences at the Autonomous University of Nayarit, applying a survey previously carried out by the University of Nayarit, applying a survey previously conducted by the UVM Public Opinion Centre, with adaptations to the social environment of our State and City previously validated in a study previously applied to students in the area of social sciences and humanities of this university (UVM, 2015).

The results are similar to studies conducted in other countries such as in the university population in Argentina (85%) and Palestine (98%), our study revealed that 89% of the population has self-medicated frequently (De Pablo, 2011). At the top of the list of medicines consumed are painkillers.

These data are broadly consistent with those reported in other studies. In addition to demographic data, 85% report that they obtained the desired effect, and 50% report that advertising has an influence when deciding what to use. Some variables such as recommendations by medical and non-medical personnel, place of purchase of medicines, as well as consumption of generics and access to health services are included.

The results suggest educating and promoting healthy behaviours among young university students through Health Education Programmes and encouraging actions that promote responsible self-medication, and extending this study to other student sectors in order to design effective intervention strategies (Quiñones, 1997, p. 4).

Contents

Methodology used

Taking into account that the aim of this study was to find out about behaviours related to the habit and practice of self-medication among university students in the area of economic-administrative sciences, its factors, circumstances and implications, as well as the perception of self-medication, the design is observational and descriptive.

Thus, the aim is to estimate the frequency of a variable of interest (in this case self-medication), in a specific population and at a specific time. The population studied corresponds to the student population in the area of economic-administrative sciences at the Autonomous University of Nayarit, also taking into account some demographic parameters such as age, sex, school level and socioeconomic level, as well as the use of social networks for consultation purposes. The survey applied had a total of 29 items, including with respect to the base survey; gender, age and educational programme studied for descriptive purposes of the population studied. The average response time for all items was 8 to 10 minutes. To answer, the individual marked in any clear and legible way (x, line, dove, etc.), the box with the corresponding answer.

Considering the student population of the area, according to the information provided by the Directorate of School Administration in coordination with the Liaison and Transparency Unit of the Autonomous University of Nayarit, there was a total of 3,781 students, so after calculating the sample size with a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of 7%, 348 surveys were applied to express the results of the research according to the total number of students in the area. The results were processed in graphical form (pie and bars) by item, as well as a general graph to explain the behaviour of the whole instrument in summary form with percentages for each variable.

Some of the groups of variables identifiable in the survey correspond to demographic variables, medicine consumption, health-related habits and conditioning factors with a possible influence on the decision to use medicines.

Results

Verifying some demographic data of interest, it can be seen in Figure 1 that the age range was between 17 and 26 years, with a majority observed between 18 and 22 years, with women representing 42% of the total number of respondents, while men accounted for 58%.
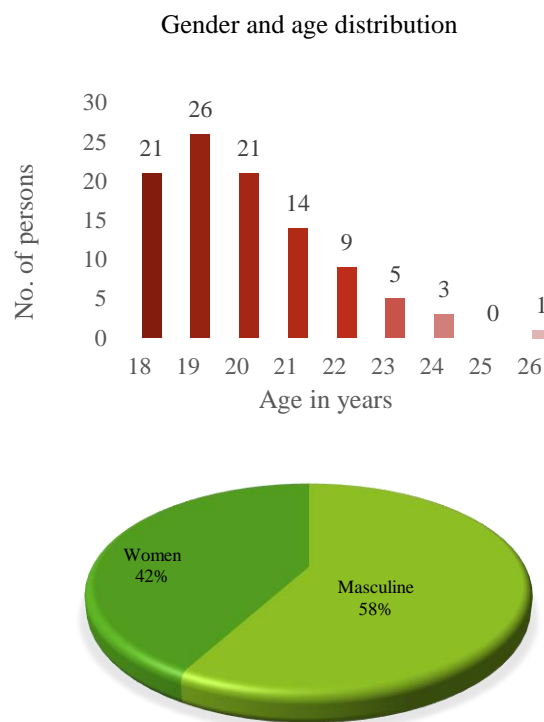
Graph 1 Distribution by sex and age of the population studied

With regard to their programme of origin, 136 of the respondents belonged to the academic programme in accounting and administration, 103 to the degree in economics and 109 to the degree in tourism.

It was also necessary to find out whether the respondents had any health services that would eventually give them access to medicines. 52% indicated that they were IMSS beneficiaries, 26% ISSSTE, 16% Seguro Popular, 5% others and 1% were null. It is worth noting that all students enrolled at our University are IMSS beneficiaries, although many of them are unaware of it. It is interesting to note that, with regard to the groups of drugs used as self-medication, there is a marked tendency to take analgesics and anti-inflammatory drugs with 38%, 41% take anti-flu and antacids, 18% take antibiotics and only 3% take other drugs such as anti-allergies and antispasmodics.

In the questions applied, the identity of the drug used was not specifically questioned, as the variability of responses was so wide that it was decided to include them in groups and thus express them graphically.

The rest of the questions applied, as well as the results obtained, are expressed below in figure 2 in the form of a mixed graph in order to synthesise the enormous amount of information obtained.

Table 1

Discussion

The habit of self-medication is frequent in the university population. The results are similar to studies carried out in other countries, such as in the university population in Argentina (85%) and Palestine (98%). Analgesics are at the top of the list of medicines consumed. These data are broadly consistent with those reported in other studies. It is known that the widespread use of analgesics and anti-inflammatory drugs can have serious consequences on the liver in the case of paracetamol consumption and on renal function and the digestive system (Aguado, 2008).

With regard to the occurrence of side effects when using non-prescription medicines, the vast majority stated that they had not experienced them, which may be associated with the fact that the type of medicines used are mostly those related to acute illnesses. This may be associated with the fact that most of the medicines used were those related to acute illnesses. 85% reported that they had the desired effect and only 13% did not have the desired effect.

According to other studies, the influence of advertising on the choice of self-medication is reflected in the results, with 97% indicating that advertising does have an influence when deciding which medication to take (Tobón, 2002).

According to the WHO, "Health education aims to ensure that individuals acquire and maintain healthy health habits, that they learn to use the health services available to them more judiciously and that they are better able to make individual and collective decisions to improve their state of health and the sanitation of the environment in which they live". In other words, in the case of self-medication, Health Education should be oriented towards informing, motivating and helping to adopt and maintain healthy practices and lifestyles when self-medicating, making a conscious and informed choice of medicines and the circumstances in which they are going to use them, and using them responsibly (Faus, 2008).

Conclusions

It is important to educate and promote healthy behaviours in young university students through Health Education Programmes and by promoting programmes that encourage responsible self-medication.

It is imperative to include in university medical services, an area of pharmaceutical care and advice by professionals specifically trained in this area, who under the provisions of the law and in the exercise of the powers granted to them by the same, provide both the university population and society in general, a support service regarding health education related to medicines.

Article

The educational programme of Pharmacobiological Chemist of the Academic Unit of Chemical, Biological and Pharmaceutical Sciences, through the students belonging to the terminal line of pharmacy and in communication with the corresponding teaching area, can provide the human resources for the fulfilment of this branch of health care as an internal service and to the community.

Within all the academic units of our University, it is necessary to propose educational activities aimed at informing, motivating and helping to adopt and maintain healthy practices and lifestyles with regard to self-medication, choosing medicines and the circumstances in which they are to be used and used in a responsible manner in a conscious and informed manner.

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