Assessment of communication skills among Pharmacy students of the University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria

Aina BA* and Ogunbiyi OO

Department of Clinical Pharmacy and Biopharmacy, Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Communication skill is the bridge between the pharmacists and the patient. Communication in health can contribute to all aspects of disease prevention and health promotion. In order to become successful pharmacists, one needs to possess excellent communication skills to serve clients.
This study was conducted at the University of Lagos to assess communication skills of Pharmacy students.

METHOD: The study was descriptive and cross sectional. It was carried out between May and July 2009. Questionnaires were used for data collection. The questionnaire had two sections - the bio data section and pre-formulated questions on communication skills which has three options and one of these is the best option.

RESULTS: A total number of 125 respondents were involved in the study which included 25 students from 200level, 50 from 300level and 50 from 500 level. Majority of them were between 18-25 years old (89.6%). There were more females (71.2%) than males (28.8%). Also most of them were Christians (71.2%).

Among the respondents, about 62% picked the best options as their answer while the rest picked other options. There was no statistical difference in the choice of best options between the different levels of study.

CONCLUSIONS: It can be concluded from the results of this study that majority of Pharmacy Students at the University of Lagos had good communication skills and they will be able to discharge their duties as pharmacists when they eventually graduate.

INTRODUCTION

Communication skills are the factor propelling professionals to achieve their goals in the 21st century. Since Pharmacy is a major professional occupation (in general and imperatively in the health sector), it is highly important to discuss or consider communication skills in the profession.

Pharmacy has moved toward a more service-oriented clinical role. The entire dispensing function must include communication of drug information to the patient. Communication implies much more than the possession or provision of information; it is a behavioural skill.

Communication has various definitions from various communication scholars and they include Charles Cooley who defined communication as a mechanism through which human relations exist and develop all the symbols of the mind together with the means of conserving them through space and preserving. Also Robert Park defined it as "a network that creates and makes possible consensus and understanding among individuals [1-6].

Communication in its broadest sense can be defined as the process of acting on information [6]. Strong communication skills are required of today's health care practitioners. Medical writers, medical students, as well as residents, biomedical researchers, Pharmacists, nurses and other health professionals must continue to improve their communication skills. Effective communication may increase patient understanding of treatment, improve compliance and, in some cases, lead to improved health. It can also make the professional-patient relationship a more equitable one.

Pharmacists can improve patient adherence to drug therapy through appropriate strategies, including patient counselling and education. In addition to verbal communication, appropriately written recommendations to physicians are also used to resolve drug therapy problems.

Communication skills and health is increasingly recognized as a necessary element in the effort to improve personal and public health [7].

Good communication engenders meaningful and trustful relationships between healthcare professionals and their patient [8]. Also, there are various benefits of good communication between a Pharmacist or any healthcare provider and their patients [9].

Benefits for patients include:
- The pharmacist –patient relationship is improved. The pharmacist is better able to seek the relevant information and recognize the problems of the patient by way of interaction and attentive listening. As a result, the patients' problems may be identified more accurately [10].
- Good communication helps the patient to recall information and comply with treatment instructions thereby improving patient compliance and satisfaction [11, 12].
- Good communication may improve patient health and outcomes. Better communication and dialogue by means of reiteration and repetition between pharmacist and patients has a beneficial effect in terms of promoting better emotional health resolution of symptoms and pain control [13].
- The overall quality of care may be improved by ensuring that patients views and wishes are taken into account as a mutual process in decision making.
- Good communication is likely to reduce the incidence of dispensing error [14].

*Corresponding Author E-mail: bolajokoaina@yahoo.com

Benefit for pharmacists:
* Patients are less likely to complain if pharmacist communicates well. There is therefore, a reduced likelihood of pharmacist being sued [15].

A study revealed that communication skills is one of the most important criterions in selecting fresh intakes in pharmacy schools in many countries especially in the United States [16]. They pointed out that communication skills are needed in becoming a successful pharmacist. As an example, in United States of America, in the latest version of PCAT (Pharmacy College Admission Test), communication skills are assessed by reading comprehension as well as verbal abilities [16].

Pharmacists reported a high level of communication skills in a study in Lagos [17]. There are a number of barriers to communication ranging from personal traits to organizational constraints [5, 18 -21]. Personal traits include lack of communication skill and negative attitude to communication.

All these prompted this study of assessment of communication skills amongst the pharmacy students of the University of Lagos.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY
Study Location:
Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Lagos

Study population:
Pharmacy students in 200, 300 and 500 Levels. The 400 level students were not involved as they were on the Students Industrial Work Scheme (SIWES).

Study Design:
Descriptive and cross sectional

Study instrument:
Self administered questionnaire containing preformulated questions adapted from Communication Skills Test designed by Robin Jacobs, Portland Community College, Portland, Oregon [22].

The questionnaire has two sections:
Section A, the socio-demographic section and Section B which includes the preformulated questions (23 in all). For each question there are 3 possible options with one out of the three being the best option.

Administration of research instrument:
The questionnaires were administered to sampled students. Their consent was obtained before administration.

Method of Analysis:
The analysis was done using a combination of manual method, MS Excel and EPI info. The analysis was mainly descriptive using frequencies but differences in responses between the levels of study was done using chi square test and p value of less than 0.05 is accepted as statistically significant.

RESULTS
In this study, a total sum of 125 students filled the questionnaires; they include the students in the 200level class, 300level class and 500level class. Overall majority of the students were between 18 and 25 years old. Majority of the students in 200 and 300 levels were between 18 and 20 years while majority of the students in 500 level were between 21 and 25 years (Table1). There was statistical significant difference between the ages of the different levels.

Overall majority of the respondents were females (71.2%) and even at each level of study. There was no statistical significant difference as to sex between the different levels (Table 2).

Most of the students were Christians both overall and in each level. There was no statistical difference between the different levels in terms of religion (Table 3)

Only about 3 % of the respondents were married and all of these were in 500 level (Table 4)

Table 1: AGE.

AGE	200 LEVEL n (%)	300 LEVEL n (%)	500 LEVEL n (%)	TOTAL n (%)
18-20	18 (72)	35 (70)	3 (6)	56 (44.8)
21-25	6 (24)	13 (26)	37 (74)	56 (44.8)
26-29	1 (4)	2(4)	10 (20)	13 (10.4)
Total	25	50	50	125

P value=0.016

Table 2: SEX.

SEX	200 L n (%)	300 L n (%)	500 L n (%)	TOTAL n (%)
MALE	8 (32)	13 (26)	15 (30)	36 (28.8)
FEMALE	17 (68)	37 (74)	35 (70)	89 (71.2)
TOTAL	25 (100)	50 (100)	50 (100)	125 (100)

P value=0.84

Table 3: RELIGION.

RELIGION	200 L n (%)	300 L n (%)	500 L n (%)	TOTAL n (%)
CHRISTIANITY	18 (72)	41 (82)	30 (60)	89 (71.2)
ISLAM	7 (28)	9 (18)	20 (40)	36 (28.8)
TOTAL	25 (100)	50 (100)	50 (100)	125 (100)

P value=0.05

Table 4: MARITAL STATUS.

MARITAL STATUS	200 L n (%)	300 L n (%)	500 L n (%)	TOTAL n (%)
SINGLE	25 (100)	50 (100)	46 (92)	121 (96.8)
MARRIED	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (8)	4 (3.2)
TOTAL	25 (100)	50 (100)	50 (100)	125 (100)

P value=0.045

Table 5: ETHNIC GROUP.

ETHNIC GROUP	200 LEVEL n (%)	300 LEVEL n (%)	500 LEVEL n (%)	TOTAL n (%)
YORUBA	14 (56)	28 (56)	22 (44)	64 (51.2)
IGBO	7 (28)	13 (26)	16 (32)	36 (28.8)
HAUSA	0 (0)	1 (2)	0 (0)	1 (0.8)
OTHERS	4 (16)	8 (16)	12 (24)	24 (19.2)

P value=0.7221

About half of the students were Yoruba (51.2%), followed by Igbo (28.8%) (Table 5). There was no statistical significant difference in the ethnicity of the respondent between the different levels.

About 62% of the respondents chose the best options of the communication skill test questions while about 38% chose other options (Table 6). There was no statistical difference in the choice of best options between the different levels of study.

DISCUSSION

A graduate's ability to communicate effectively can greatly affect his/her career development in the future workplace [23]. Communication in the area of health is consistently a central concern for policy makers, economists, and academics [24] . Similarly, communication skills remain an important factor in the field of pharmacy. Undoubtedly, Tindall et al. [25] have explained this by highlighting the needs for communication skills in pharmacy such as establishing ongoing relationship between the pharmacists and patients, providing ways to ensure patient's information and ultimately, to improve the health of the patient. These three reasons were to state the importance of communication skills in pharmacy by indicating that without communication skills, pharmacists are unable to achieve the goals of a pharmacist as a health provider to the patients or customers due to inability of pharmacists to understand patients and their health problems, gain the patient's trust as well and engage patients to open up in their conversations.

To further illustrate the idea of Tindall et al [25], good communication skills are stressed upon pharmacists as it determines the grounds for trust in the pharmacist-patient relationship [13].

Table 6: COMMUNICATION OPTION.

LEVEL	Best Option n (%)	Others n (%)	Total n (%)
200	347 (60.35)	228 (39.65)	575 (100)
300	705 (61.30)	445 (38.70)	1150 (100)
500	729 (63.39)	421 (36.61)	1150 (100)
TOTAL	1781 (61.95)	1094 (38.05)	2875 (100)

P value=0.3979

According to McDonough and Bennet [13] " Pharmacy students should understand the importance of this relationship…establishes a covenant between pharmacist and patient…"

From the results obtained, it was observed that about 62% of the respondents chose the best options, whereas 38% chose other options, though the options picked were neither right nor wrong but it is indicative that these pharmacy students have good communication skills. This result is gladdening to the heart because it implies that these will turn out to be good communicators which is good for professional performance of pharmacists in terms of building relationship and trust between the pharmacist and the patient and ultimately improve the health care of the patient. Also these students will be good team players which is necessary for pharmacy professionals being members of health care team. Considering the fact that the chi square analysis gave a p value of 0.3979 which is greater than 0.05, it can be stated the there are no significance difference in the communication skill abilities of the respondents.

Female respondents were more than male which is not out of place because female students in pharmacy are more than male students. Also the fact that most students are of Yoruba ethnicity and are Christians is not out of place because the University is situated in the part of the country where most people are Yorubas and Christians. Most students are between the ages 18 and 25 which is usually the age range of young adults in the University and the fact that majority were not married corresponds with the age group involved.

CONCLUSION:

From the results there is good communication skills amongst pharmacy students of University of Lagos. This means that the Pharmacy students of the University of Lagos will come out to be good communicators and will be able to discharge their duties effectively as pharmacists upon graduation. The respondents that did not pick the best options can improve their communication skills over time since there is communication skills as a course in the pharmacy curriculum.

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DISCLOSURE

The authors have nothing to disclose

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