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Exploring the community pharmacist's role in palliative care: Effective communication in practice

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Changes in health care provision have led to an emphasis on providing end of life care within the home. Community pharmacists are in a good position to provide services at the end of life to community-based palliative care patients and carers. As such this study explored the play a role in the palliative care community based team. A multiple qualitative case study design was adopted. A total of 16 focus groups and 19 interviews with pharmacists, nurses, general practitioners and carers were undertaken across metropolitan and regional settings in Western Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria (Australian States). Data were analysed using thematic analysis, adopting a framework that allowed similarities and differences across stakeholder groups and locations to be examined and compared. Three main themes emerged: Effective communication; Challenges to effective communication; and: Towards best practice, which comprised two sub-themes: Community pharmacists' skills and community pharmacists' needs. A key aspect of the provision of palliative care was having effective communication skills. A focus on interpersonal support was seen as a natural extension of the community pharmacist's professional role. Although community pharmacists saw an opportunity to provide interpersonal support, they suggested that they would need to develop better communication skills to fulfil this role. Community pharmacists are willing to support palliative care patients and carers but need continuing professional development.

Biography

Moira O'Connor has a PhD in Psychology and works as a Senior Research Fellow, looking at the psychological aspects of cancer and palliative care, at Curtin University, Western Australia. She has published more than 50 papers in high impact journals and has received extensive funding in projects looking at cancer, palliative care and bereavement. She received a tender from the Pharmacy Guild of Australia to examine how the community pharmacist can be more actively involved in the palliative care team.

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