

LAY SUMMARY OF A RESEARCH STUDY CONDUCTED IN THE SCHOOL

Public views on medicines-related services in community pharmacy

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Why we did this study

While many people regularly get medicines from community pharmacies, not so many are aware that pharmacists are a good source of advice on medicines. When they dispense prescriptions for patients or sell medicines over the counter, pharmacists are expected to provide advice to people as well. The NHS funds pharmacists to provide two services designed to help patients with medicines: Medicines Use Reviews (MUR) and the New Medicines Service (NMS). Both involve a discussion with a pharmacist in a private consultation room in the pharmacy. Most pharmacies in England have a consultation room.

What we wanted to find out

We wanted to explore the general public's attitudes towards and experiences of medicines-related advice that pharmacists offer.

What we did

We developed a questionnaire, which was based on a similar questionnaire used for different pharmacy services, which included questions to find out about people's:

- experiences of receiving advice and willingness to use pharmacy advisory services
- preferences for different attributes of pharmacies, staff and practices
- views on promotion of the medicines-related services pharmacists provide
- demographic characteristics.

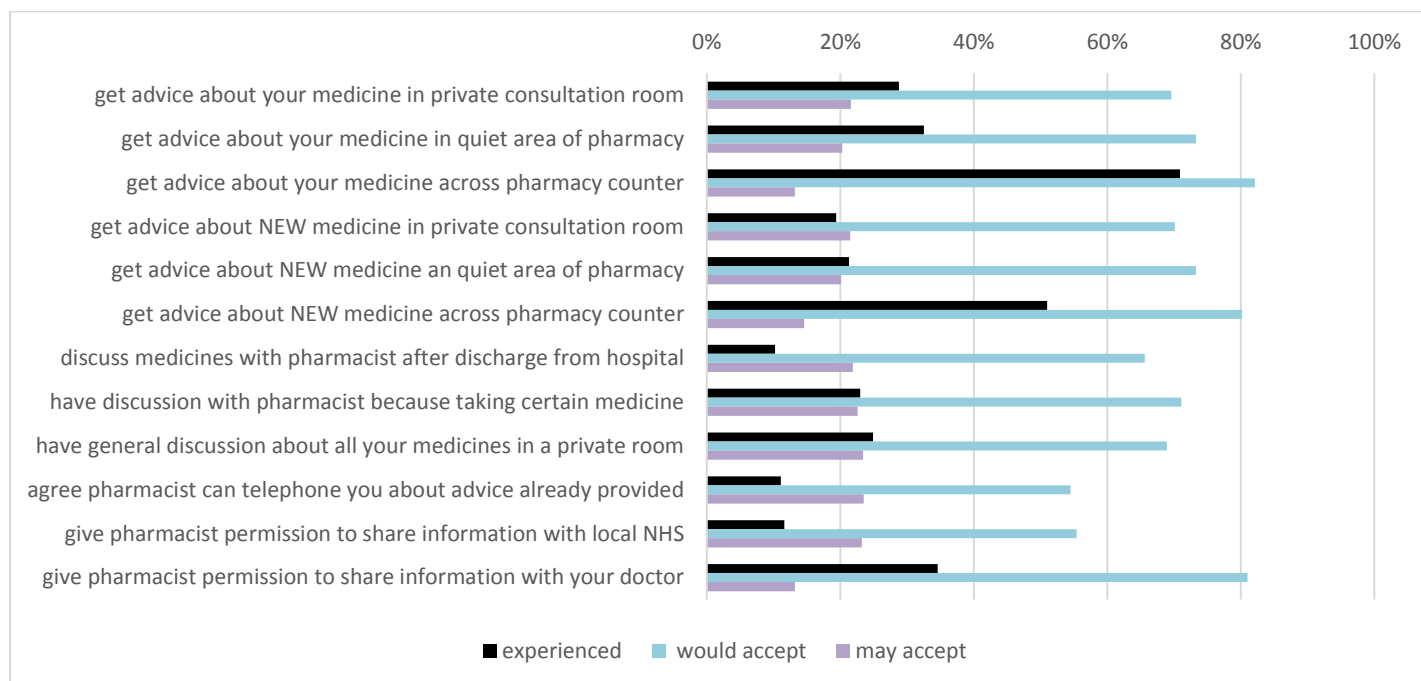
Who we asked

We invited adults aged 18 years or over to complete the questionnaire using face-to-face interviews in high street shopping areas. The survey was conducted in 10 towns throughout Kent and we recruited 100 people from each town, giving a total of 1000 responses. The recruitment used quota sampling to ensure that the respondents were similar to others within the county in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and deprivation status (based on postcode). So 53% were female, 28% aged 18 to 34 years, 50% 35 – 64, and 22% 65 or over. 60% used medicines regularly and 51% used a pharmacy at least once a month.

What we found out

- 72% of people would be willing to wait for 10 to 15 minutes to talk to a pharmacist
- 71% would be willing to make an appointment to talk to a pharmacist
- 52% would only be willing to wait for up to a day for an appointment with a pharmacist
- 51% would be willing to spend up to 15 minutes talking to a pharmacist, but 17% would only wish to spend no more than 5 minutes.

Most people (71%) got advice about their medicines over the counter and were happy with this in future (82%). Only 25% had had a general discussion about their medicines in a private room (MUR) and 19% a discussion about a new medicine in a private room (NMS) (see Figure).



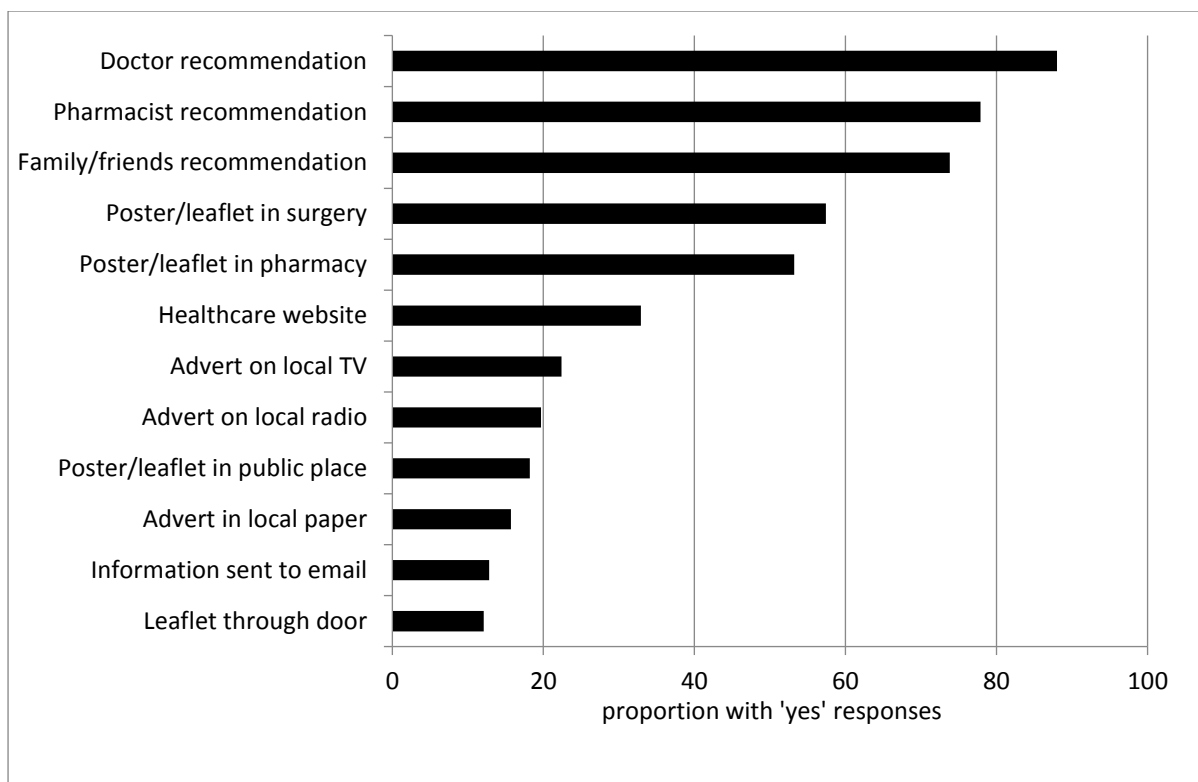
Most people were willing to have discussions like these (69% MUR, 70% NMS), but slightly fewer were willing to have a discussion with a pharmacist because they had recently been discharged from hospital (66%). This is one of the times that a review of medicines with a pharmacist is important because medicines are often changed during a stay in hospital.

Most people expressed a preference for a pharmacy close to home (84%) or to their doctor's surgery (80%), they wanted staff to be approachable (87%) and to make it easy to talk to the pharmacist (82%). 66% prefer to use the same pharmacy, mostly those who use regular medicines, but there were no really strong preferences for ownership: 33% preferred a pharmacy owned by a large company, 27% by a pharmacist working there and 21% in a supermarket. More women than men preferred a pharmacy where they recognise the pharmacist, for a pharmacist the same gender as them, not to share their reasons for asking to speak to the pharmacist with staff and to have a conversation in a private room.

Other findings:

- 59% prefer not to speak when others can overhear
- 73% prefer a pharmacy which has a good relationship with their GP surgery
- 95% trust the pharmacist to keep their personal information confidential
- 80% of people said they did not want to interrupt a pharmacist who was busy in the dispensary

Opinions on what promotional methods would encourage them to use pharmacy-based medicines-related advice services are shown in the figure below. Personal recommendations stand out as being the most effective.



What this means

Most people are happy with receiving advice about medicines over the counter in a pharmacy, but many do not like being overheard, and most are willing to have private conversations with pharmacists in a consulting room.

The NHS pays pharmacists to provide advice to patients who need to have their medicines reviewed, who have just started a new medicine, who have recently been discharged from hospital and who are taking certain types of medicines (for asthma and other respiratory conditions, diabetes, hypertension, and blood-thinning medicines). Almost all pharmacists provide these services, but most people aren't aware of them.

People trust in the pharmacist to keep person information confidential, but are happy for them to share information with a GP or the local NHS.

Not everyone is happy to allow pharmacists to call them by telephone to give further advice, but the New Medicines Service requires a follow-up discussion, which can be done by telephone, to save a further visit to the pharmacy. Perhaps this is not yet widespread so people aren't used to it.

How you can use this research

Pharmacists are generally very happy to provide advice about your medicines and are also paid to do so.

If you have had one of the services (MUR or NMS) and found it useful, do tell your friends and family, because this is one of the most effective ways of encouraging other people to use the service.

If you have never heard of or experienced getting advice from a pharmacist about medicines, you should consider it. They are acknowledged as the easily accessible health professional on the high street with a lot of expertise in medicines.

Don't worry about interrupting a pharmacist working in the dispensary. They are there to provide advice as well as dispense medicines.