

Obtaining Patient Input for Prioritizing Enhancements to Pharmacy Services

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INTRODUCTION

It is important to know and understand the "trends that are shaping health care in order to determine where pharmacy fits and what actions are needed."¹ The new emphasis on patient-oriented pharmacy services may transfigure the profession of pharmacy and help widen its scope.

The Alberta Cancer Board (ACB) has 2 tertiary care centres, in Calgary and Edmonton. At these sites, the ACB pharmacy department provides ambulatory dispensing and patient counselling, full intravenous chemotherapy admixture service, and support for investigational and clinical trials. In addition, the Edmonton site has a 45-bed in-patient care unit with staff pharmacists. The ACB pharmacy also supports 13 community cancer centres, providing contract pharmacy services through regional pharmacy departments in local hospitals. The aim is to provide consistent, high-quality pharmacy services to Albertans who have cancer in all parts of the province. Thus, any new services should be made available in all 15 of these locations.

This report describes a survey of patients undertaken to help us understand their perceptions of useful pharmacy services and to assist us in prioritizing potential service enhancements.

SURVEY PROCEDURES

A questionnaire to determine preferences concerning possible enhancements to pharmacy services was developed for ACB pharmacy patients across the province. Ideas for enhancements to pharmacy services were generated by the authors. The ideas were grouped into 4 main categories: communication, education, product, and waiting area. The question-

Table I. Overview of Responses to Questionnaire Obtained from 7 Pharmacy Sites of the Alberta Cancer Board

Site	Locale	Mode of Return	No. of Completed Questionnaires
1	Urban	Mail	22
		In person	19
2	Urban	Mail	20
		In person	21
3	Rural	In person	24
4	Rural	Mail	2
5	Rural	Mail	3
6	Rural	In person	2
7	Rural	In person	1
Total			114

naire consisted of 13 questions, each with 4 possible responses: very useful, somewhat useful, not very useful, and not at all useful. These 4 responses were condensed into 2 categories for the analysis: useful (comprising very useful and somewhat useful) and not useful (comprising not very useful and not at all useful). This allowed us to easily distinguish whether the respondent was partial or not to any particular enhancement. In addition, there was a space for patients' comments and suggestions at the end of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was circulated to as many cancer patients as possible at each of the 15 ACB pharmacies over a 6-week period. Each ACB pharmacy was responsible for distributing and collecting the questionnaires. The completed questionnaires were returned to the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton for collation of responses.



Table II. Patients' Opinions of the Usefulness of Potential Enhancements to Pharmacy Services

Potential Enhancement	No. (and %) of Responses*		
Communication			
Pharmacy e-mail address: Would an ACB pharmacy e-mail address, where you could send questions, comments, information, or even your prescription refill requests, be useful to you?	Useful	37	(32.4)
	Not useful	73	(64.0)
	No reply	4	(3.5)
Pharmacy Web site: Would an ACB pharmacy Web site, where you could easily access information about cancer and the drugs that are used for treating cancer, be useful to you?	Useful	35	(30.7)
	Not useful	75	(65.8)
	No reply	4	(3.5)
Pharmacist call-back: Would a call-back by your ACB pharmacist, to help monitor your drug therapy and to answer any questions or concerns that you may have, be useful to you?	Useful	63	(55.3)
	Not useful	47	(41.2)
	No reply	4	(3.5)
Toll-free number: Would a toll-free telephone number with voice mail, where you could order your prescription refills without long-distance charges, be useful for you?	Useful	60	(52.6)
	Not useful	51	(44.7)
	No reply	3	(2.6)
Education			
Workshops or seminars: Would workshops dealing with cancer topics, given by ACB pharmacy staff, be useful to you? If you would find these useful, do you have any suggestions for the content of the workshops?	Useful	66	(57.9)
	Not useful	42	(36.8)
	No reply	6	(5.3)
Monthly newsletter: Would a monthly patient newsletter, containing information on the topic of cancer as well as new developments in the field, be useful to you?	Useful	86	(75.4)
	Not useful	25	(21.9)
	No reply	3	(2.6)
Pharmacy tour: Would it be useful to you to take a tour of the pharmacy at a prearranged time to see how medications are prepared?	Useful	38	(33.3)
	Not useful	73	(64.0)
	No reply	3	(2.6)

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SURVEY RESPONSES

Seven of the 15 ACB pharmacy sites returned a total of 114 completed questionnaires (Table I). The respondents were classified as either rural or urban so that differences between these 2 populations could be identified. The respondents were also classified as to whether they returned the questionnaire by mail or completed the questionnaire while at the ACB pharmacy.

An overview of the respondents' opinions on the usefulness of each of the proposed service enhancements is shown in Table II. The most popular ideas overall were a monthly newsletter for patients, availability of pamphlets and a video library in the pharmacy waiting area, larger print on prescription labels, workshops dealing with cancer topics, and pharmacist call-backs to monitor drug therapy. When we analysed the

specific subgroups (rural and urban, mail and in-person responses) the following differences in the overall survey results appeared. The rural respondents valued 4 of these 5 enhancements but expressed a preference for a toll-free telephone information line in place of a pharmacist call-back service (data not shown). The toll-free line is an important service that could be provided for this specific patient group. Respondents who returned their questionnaires by mail valued only the monthly newsletter and larger print on prescription labels (data not shown). In contrast, those who returned their questionnaires personally valued the 5 ideas that were considered useful overall. They also valued a nicely decorated and esthetically pleasing pharmacy waiting area (data not shown).

Equally important was the clear message that computer-assisted enhancements were not perceived

Table II. Patients' Opinions of the Usefulness of Potential Enhancements to Pharmacy Services (continued)

Potential Enhancement	No. (and %) of Responses*		
Product			
Disposal/spill kit: Would it be useful to you to receive a disposal/spill kit with certain prescriptions to make disposal in your home easier?	Useful	35	(30.7)
	Not useful	67	(58.8)
	No reply	12	(10.5)
Larger prescription print: Would larger print for easier reading of our prescription labels be useful to you?	Useful	65	(57.0)
	Not useful	39	(34.2)
	No reply	10	(8.8)
Memory aids: Would memory aids to help you take your medication, such as pill organizers and medication calendars, be useful to you?	Useful	58	(50.9)
	Not useful	46	(40.4)
	No reply	10	(8.8)
Waiting area			
Decorated waiting area: Would a pharmacy waiting area that is decorated with pleasant colours, flowers, plants, and pictures be useful to you? Any specific comments or suggestions are welcome.	Useful	55	(48.2)
	Not useful	43	(37.7)
	No reply	16	(14.0)
Pharmacist photographs and names: Would it be useful to you if a photograph and the name of each pharmacist were displayed in the waiting area?	Useful	50	(43.9)
	Not useful	53	(46.5)
	No reply	11	(9.6)
Video library and pamphlets: Would a video library and pamphlets in the pharmacy waiting area, where you could have access to a variety of educational, informational, and instructional media related to the topic of cancer, be useful to you?	Useful	68	(59.6)
	Not useful	37	(32.5)
	No reply	9	(7.9)

* Some percentages do not sum to 100 because of rounding.

ACB = Alberta Cancer Board.

to be of value to these patients. This opinion was reflected in both the responses to the structured questions and a number of comments.

CONCLUSION

It is essential for the growth of the profession of pharmacy that pharmacists take a proactive role in caring for and providing services to their patients.¹ This role includes the formulation of new, creative, and effective ideas that may enhance pharmacy services for patients. Because pharmacy patients are ultimately at the heart of pharmacy practice, it is imperative that patient needs and preferences influence the pharmacy services provided.

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Reference

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