

Community Pharmacists in Ho Chi Minh City: STI Management and HIV/ AIDS Knowledge and Attitudes

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Background

Sexually Transmitted Infections:

- An estimated 85% of all STI in Viet Nam are treated in the private sector: private doctors offices and community pharmacies
- These facilities rarely have the ability to do diagnostic testing, so most STI treatment is empiric based on the patients' symptoms
- As the first or only access to the healthcare system for many patients, community pharmacies can play an important role in treating STI and referring patients for HIV/AIDS prevention and care services

Background

HIV/AIDS

- ARV are increasing in availability and decreasing in price in Viet Nam
- Many patients will access community pharmacies with symptoms related to HIV/AIDS or opportunistic infections
- Few pharmacists in Viet Nam have had any training on HIV/AIDS

Pharmacy Education in Viet Nam

Three levels of pharmacists:

- High-Degree Pharmacist: 5 years University
- Middle Degree Pharmacist: 3 years university
- Pharmacy assistant: 6-12 months training in medical college

Pharmacies in HCMC

Private Pharmacies in the Community:

- 2,667 registered (2003)
- Only High-Degree pharmacists on register to operate a pharmacy, and each pharmacist can register only one pharmacy
- The pharmacist must be on duty at all times, although in practice the pharmacy is often staffed by middle-degree pharmacists or pharmacy assistants

Pharmacist Training on Syndromic Management of STI

- Program to train community pharmacists and private doctors to treat STI based on syndromic management
- Developed and implemented by the Dermatology-Venerology Hospital of HCMC
- Based on WHO guidelines published in 1997
- Has been carried out in all districts in HCMC for:
 - 2,500 pharmacists
 - 2,250 private doctors

Pharmacist Training on Syndromic Management of STI

Content of the training:

- Medical history
- Examination
- Diagnosis
- Treatment
- STD counseling
- Partner notification
- Follow-up
- Reporting.

Survey of Community Pharmacists

Objectives:

- Evaluate quality and effectiveness of the STI Syndromic Management training
- Determine current STI management in community pharmacies
- Determine knowledge and attitudes of community pharmacists regarding HIV transmission and prevention
- Identify training needs for community pharmacists

Survey of Community Pharmacists

Methods:

- 200 locations visited: 25 pharmacies randomly selected in each of 8 districts (Q4, Q8, Q10, Binh Chanh, Binh Thanh, Go Vap, Tan Binh, Thu Duc)
- Standardized questionnaire with 34 questions
- The pharmacist on duty was interviewed after giving informed consent

Results

Demographics:

Gender: Female 73% Male 27%

Education: High-Degree 17%

Middle-Degree 30%

Pharm assistant 53%

Median number of hours worked per week: 70

Median number of years working: 7

Results

How are drugs dispensed?

Pharmacist decides: 33%

Patient requests: 30%

Doctor Prescribes: 37%

Results

Participation in STI Syndromic Management Training

Attended Training: 30%

Training rated good/very good: 98%

Training useful for work: 93%

Would attend future trainings: 97%

Results: Syndromic STI Treatment

STI Syndrome	Treatment (%)		
	Incorrect	Partially Correct	Correct*
Vaginal discharge	4	96	0
Vaginitis	7	55	39
Cervicitis	76	24	0
Genital Ulcer	62	15	23
Urethral discharge	46	42	12

* There was no significant difference in treatment given by pharmacists who had or had not attended the STI Syndromic Management Training

Results: Knowledge of VCT Services

Free HIV testing available: 73%

Anonymous HIV testing available: 43%

Where to go for free HIV test: 33%

Correct referral for VCT services:

In the district: 8%

In other districts: 11%

Conclusions

- Most staff working in community pharmacies are assistants with only 6-12 months of training
- Only 30% of staff in community pharmacies have received training in STI Syndromic Management
- Management of STI in community pharmacies is not good and does not meet international or Vietnam Ministry of Health guidelines
- Pharmacists are not aware of VCT services in HCMC or in their own districts

Recommendations

- Update the STI Syndromic Management Guidelines
- Distribute the STI SM guidelines to all pharmacies and private doctors
- Provide additional training and follow-up information to pharmacists and private doctors
- Provide pharmacists with information on the availability of VCT and other STI/HIV/AIDS services
- Provide IEC materials to pharmacists for distribution to clients:
 - HIV prevention materials
 - STI prevention materials
 - VCT sites and services

Thank You!