The usage of non-prescription drugs by the residents of Nairobi city, Kenya

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Non-prescription drugs refer to pharmaceuticals available without medical prescription. Problems related to the safety and quality of drugs exists in many places around the world today, in developing countries. Consumers need information and education on medicines and appropriate treatment-seeking strategies for a number of compelling public health reasons. The main objective of the study was to determine the usage of non-prescription drugs in Nairobi City by assessing the knowledge, attitude and practices of the non-prescription drug users. This study was undertaken in some sampled chemists within Nairobi Central Business District and a total of 250 respondents were interviewed. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. A sample of 10 chemists was conveniently picked on and 25 respondents were picked from each pharmacist. The sampled data was collected using pretested questionnaires for the customers and in-depth interviews with the retailing staff. The data was analysed using the SPSS program. Chi Square was performed to establish relation between variables. Fifty one point two percent of the respondents were males and 48.8% females. The study indicates that socio-economic factors such as age, level of education, gender and religion were found to have a direct influence on the choice of drugs. Painkillers were found to be the most commonly used medications (23.4%) and there was statistical relationship between education and practice ($\chi^2=16.437$, df=12; $P=0.0176$). Chronic disease remedies, anti malarial drugs, stomach disease remedies, medications for reproductive health and other medications for dietary supplementation such as iron and vitamin tablets and skin and eye ointments were found to be the most commonly used medications in that order. The respondents came to know of these drugs from previous prescriptions by the doctor (43.6%), previous knowledge of the disease (30.5%), adverts in the media (16.0%), advice from friends (8.6%) and finally from other sources (1.2%) such as pamphlets, health magazines and documentaries on health. There was a significant statistical relationship between knowledge of the non-prescription drugs and gender ($\chi^2=16.535$, df=4; $P=0.002$) and employment ($\chi^2=23.965$, df=8; $P=0.002$). The consumers gave a variety of options that they would resort to if the purchased drugs did not work. These ranged from seeking medical advice to waiting for the condition to disappear on its own. The majority said they would resort to seeking medical advice (80.7%). There was a significant statistical relationship between religion and the options resorted to ($\chi^2=42.942$, df=16; $P=0.000$). Good services in terms of the attention given, drug prices and the personnel qualification were the major factors promoting the use of non-prescription drugs. It was descriptive cross-sectional survey. The results will be used by policy makers in empowering communities or rational use of the non-prescription drugs.