Comparison of Community & Hospital Pharmacists’ Sources of Information About Medicines: Written Sources

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Introduction
- Despite making up ~70% of pharmacists, community pharmacists (CPs) submit a small minority of the enquiries received by the UKMi network.
- Hospital pharmacists (HPs) submit a significant proportion of enquiries, despite making up ~20% of the work force.
- Newer CP services may require increased access to information about medicines, so the objectives of this study were to identify which written sources of information are used by CPs & HPs, & to explore reasons for any differences.

Method
- Quantitative data were collected via a questionnaire sent to CPs & HPs across the south west of England in Autumn 2011.
- The questionnaires contained only minor sector specific variations.
- Qualitative data from telephone interviews were analysed to explore the reasoning behind individual pharmacists’ decisions.

Results
- Quantitative data were obtained from 129 CPs & 80 HPs, with similar levels of professional experience in each group.
- CPs reported accessing information on medicines to answer a query significantly less often than HPs (means of 9.4 & 19.0 times/week respectively; p=0.002).
- When asked where they would look for information in specific scenarios, CPs preferred “general” resources such as the BNF, whereas HPs preferred a wider range of “specialist” resources.
- All HPs reported having unrestricted or only partially restricted internet access in the workplace, but 56% of CPs reported having either no internet access or access to only pre-approved websites.
- Interviews highlighted the difficulties CPs face in obtaining information on medicines: they appeared less confident when using the internet or new information sources.
- CPs reported that new services had increased their need for information, but they did not have enough access to specialist sources & it was difficult to find new resources.

Discussion
- Despite a growing need for information, CPs face a number of barriers to accessing information about medicines, including limited internet access & lack of knowledge of the range of information available.
- This is reflected in their use of a narrower range of less specialist resources & might result in poorer quality answers.
- The publication of a list of “essential resources” for CPs would be a first step in addressing this issue, to support the further development of safe CP services.