Investigating the Pharmacy-specific information needs of older palliative care patients and their carers

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AIM
To investigate older palliative care patients & carers’ access to/need for information about medicines and pharmacy services.

SUBJECTS & SETTING
The elderly population are high users of Palliative Care Community Pharmacy services. In the absence of literature describing older palliative care patients and their carer’s use of the community pharmacy as a source of medicines information, an in-depth study of their current access to medicines information and knowledge of community pharmacy services was undertaken - as part of a Macmillan Cancer Support funded Pharmacist project in NHS GG&C.

METHODS
Focus groups were conducted using a purposive sample of older patients and their carers. 27 individuals (14 patients and 13 carers) aged between 57-79 yrs old participated. Interviews were subjected to a thematic analysis.

RESULTS
Access to Medicines Information
• Patient Information Leaflets (package inserts) were widely used - the Internet was used least
• Face-to-face interactions were preferred
• Pharmacists were seen as a source of information for medicines but not for other services.

Knowledge & awareness of services from community pharmacies
• Generally found to be poor – also limited knowledge about prescription procedures, particularly for ‘controlled’ medication i.e. opioid pain relief
• Many participants have little direct contact with their Pharmacist, although some examples of good practice were identified

“...the girl from the chemist says to me ‘oh you shouldn’t be coming up here’. She says ‘get your medicine delivered...we’ll get it done’ (Female, Age Unknown, Patient)

“...the leaflets in the box ...sometimes I read them, sometimes I don’t...you know... but its good just to have them as additional information...” (Female, 76yrs, carer)

“I would go to the pharmacist if there was anything about the medication that I didn’t understand”. (Female, 63, Carer)

FUTURE DIRECTIONS
• Community Pharmacies should be more pro-active in the dissemination of clinical & non clinical information
• Community Pharmacies could signpost patients/carers to other reliable information resources
• Patients/carers should be encouraged to ask about medicine supply arrangements
• Patients/carers should be encouraged to share details of their diagnosis and discuss their medicine needs and entitlements with the Pharmacist as well as their family/friends.