PHARMACISTS’ CONCERNS AND SUGGESTIONS RELATED TO THE SALE OF TOBACCO AND ALCOHOL IN PHARMACIES

Jerome E. Kotecki, HSD; Sona I. Elanjian, PharmD; Mohammad R. Torabi, PhD; and Jeffrey K. Clark, HSD

ABSTRACT: A random sample of Pharmacists in Indiana was selected and surveyed regarding their thoughts and comments on the sale of tobacco and alcoholic products by pharmacies. A total of 212 pharmacists provided written responses to an open-ended question. The replies were then synthesized into major themes. The majority of comments categorized revealed strong opposition to pharmacies selling tobacco and alcohol products. The most frequently occurring message regarding the sale of these products by pharmacies was that it goes against the pharmacist’s role as a professional health care provider and may harm their image. For some pharmacists, this issue posed a moral dilemma between caring for patient safety and the economic incentives provided by the sale of tobacco and alcohol. Based on these findings, a follow-up phone survey was conducted to solicit suggestions from pharmacists on how to advocate against the sale of tobacco and alcohol by pharmacies. The majority of pharmacists strongly recommended that they need to do more among themselves and within their store environment, rather than have regulations imposed on pharmacies when it comes to limiting the sale of these products.

INTRODUCTION

Cigarette smoking is presently responsible for approximately one of every five deaths in the United States and is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in our society. Smoking costs the nation more than $50 billion annually in medical care expenditures. Misuse of alcohol contributes approximately to another 20,000 deaths and confers to more than $40 billion in medical care costs annually.

Funded by a grant from the Office of Academic Research and Sponsored Programs at Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306.

Jerome E. Kotecki is an Assistant Professor, Department of Physiology & Health Science, Ball State University; Sona I. Elanjian is an Associate Professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice, Butler University; Mohammad R. Torabi is a Chancellor’s Professor and Assistant Chairperson, Department of Applied Health Science, Indiana University; and Jeffrey K. Clark is an Assistant Professor, Department of Physiology & Health Science, Ball State University.

Requests for reprints should be addressed to: Dr. Jerome E. Kotecki, Department of Physiology and Health Science, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306.
The health and economic losses due to cigarette smoking and use of alcohol are important reasons why public health prevention activities are receiving greater attention among health care professionals.\textsuperscript{5} According to the 1995 Pew Commission report,\textsuperscript{6} health care providers will be required to promote public awareness of health and disease through promotional and policy campaigns. Success in this venture requires skills in being able to assess, select, and implement appropriate strategies for specific concerns within a targeted community population. Consequently, the role of health care providers as individuals who provide suggestions and recommendations on appropriate health promotion strategies is becoming increasingly important.

One significant health care provider group is pharmacists. Recent pharmaceutical educational goals address the expanding role of the pharmacist in public health activities. The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy pharmaceutical care model of practice includes training for pharmacists that focuses on health promotion and disease prevention programming.\textsuperscript{7} A recent study revealed that nearly 90\% of the pharmacists surveyed in Indiana agreed that they should play a role in health promotion and disease prevention activities for the public.\textsuperscript{8}

Among personal health practices, pharmacists ranked the elimination of cigarette smoking and not abusing alcohol as very beneficial health promotion activities.\textsuperscript{9} Accordingly, other studies have documented that the overwhelming majority of pharmacists do not believe that pharmacies should be selling tobacco and alcohol.\textsuperscript{8,10,11} However, these findings are contradictory to studies revealing pharmacies selling these products.

Many pharmacies continue to sell cigarettes and alcoholic beverages.\textsuperscript{8,10,11} Torabi and Seffrin\textsuperscript{11} reported in 1991 that 71 percent of pharmacies sold cigarettes and 35 percent sold alcoholic beverages in Indiana. In 1996, a follow-up study found 64 percent of pharmacies still selling cigarettes and approximately 42 percent selling alcoholic beverages in their Indiana stores.\textsuperscript{8}

The question of what influences a pharmacist to sell unhealthy products while embracing a negative view of the practice needs to be further researched.\textsuperscript{9} This study was designed to provide an opportunity for pharmacists to present their thoughts in writing about the selling of tobacco and alcohol by pharmacies. Consequently, the primary purpose of this study was to identify the most prevalent, self-reported reasons pharmacists had regarding the sale of cigarettes and alcohol by pharmacies. Also, to complement these findings, a follow-up telephone interview was completed to gather suggestions pharmacists would have in advocating against the sale of cigarettes and alcohol by pharmacies.