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HPM&B

Judging Dept.

Lucinda Schoonbeck

Student

HPM&B

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Edward Dombroski, RPh., M.S., P.D.

Dept or Program Years in program

Mentor

Consumer Education On Over-the-counter Pain Relievers

Author (s)

Lucinda Schoonbeck

Accidental misuse of over-the-counter pain relievers can result in serious health consequences. Acetaminophen was in the headlines of a major newspaper recently due to its contribution to over one-half of the cases of acute liver failure in the United States. Use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen and aspirin, can have gastrointestinal side effects and induce kidney toxicity. Severe side effects from use of these medications most often occurs when the maximum daily dosage is exceeded, which can happen (unintentionally) when the active ingredient is found in multiple over-the-counter and prescription preparations. In an effort to educate New Yorkers about the dangers associated with misuse of over-the-counter pain relievers, the New York State Department of Health selected a three-page patient leaflet set published by a medical education company to assess its educational value to consumers. The leaflets were made available in pharmacies in a flip chart format. This flip chart was sent to 100 pharmacies in New York State selected by a stratified random sampling methodology. Each pharmacy was also sent five consumer surveys, and contacted over the telephone one week after the flip charts and surveys were mailed. One hundred and three consumer surveys were returned (21% response rate), and the results indicated that the flip chart was perceived to be useful by consumers. Limitations to this study include use of a convenience sample of pharmacy customers, and the higher educational attainment and younger age distribution of the respondents compared with the population of New York State.