Review article

Self Medication - Reasons, Risks and Benefits

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Abstract:
Self medication is defined as selection use of medicines without any doctor’s prescription by people or over the counter medicines for their minor illness or symptoms Or According to WHO self medication is selection and use of non prescription medicines by individuals to treat self recognized illness or symptoms. It is practiced world wild. This article covers (aims to find) the reason for self medication medicines used for symptoms, most commonly used medicines, who all use self medication, name of the medicines and from where they get information about medicine most commonly used medicines are pain killers antipyretics, cough cold remedies, anti allergies antacids, vitamins and tonics. All though some medicines are risk free and useful for treatment of minor health problems, their excess & regular use may lead to some serious health problems and side effects and adverse reactions. The practice of self care may change locality and rejoin. It is more in younger and educated people because they have no time to go to doctor and no patience to wait. This article presents all about self medication.

Key words – Self medication, Antibiotics, Prescription

Introduction:
Self Medication is major form of self care. It involves use of medicines by the persons to treat self recognized minor illness both gender (male and female), socioeconomic states rich & poor, educated and non educated.¹

World scenario - Self medication is practiced all over world. Today all countries rich poor, developing, developed, all are practicing self medication. Now a day’s worldwide appreciation is seen towards self medication and self care.
Countries like Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Cost Arica, el Salvador frame, Germany, Guatemala, India, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, Venezuela & many other countries are practicing self medication use of SM also depends upon healthcare system culture, education, economics, religion, awareness about medicine, influence of media & communication etc. But minor illness & symptoms, suffering of human being is same all over the world. Some study shows South Africa is using more self medication compared to others. Percentage of OTC medicine satisfaction is in Mexico.²,³,⁴

Definition – According to WHO, self medication is the selection & use of medicines by persons to treat self-recognized illness or symptoms. This broadly includes old prescription, referring prescription, consulting friends, and acquiring medication without prescription, consulting friends & relatives, neighbor’s social group sharing medicines.
Concept of rational drug use is inherent to the issue of self medication. Halophiles the Alexandrian physician in 300 BC had very well said that
medicines are nothing in themselves, but are the very hands of god if employed reasons & prudence. Why do people use or prefer self medication? Now a day’s people are conscious about health. Patients want immediate relief. Say for example a lady wants attend pooja or she wants to get married, or a student to attend exam she wants to postpone her periods. Once they go to doctor and get the prescription and they go on using same for self care not only that they advise to friends, relatives and others. Whoevers in need?

Self medication has number of reasons ex – use for self care feeling sympathy towards family members, no time to go to doctor and wait in long queue. There is an increased trend of self medication particularly among educated people. This is due to improved socio economic states, education, life style changes lack of time, easily available medicine, both husband and wife working, knowledge about illness and managing capacity, easily available information from media.

Self medication is 1st option for minor illness. It is common practice worldwide may be it varies from country to country. In the treatment minor illness problems are self limited, so self medication is used. One way it is useful for government, this can reduce cost of health care and allow health workers to concentrate on emergency disease, but at the same time side effects of self medication can be emergency same time self medication is very dangerous too. Self medication provides a lower cost alternative for people who cannot afford the cost of clinical service and medicine bill, if person uses self medication for minor problems it is well and good, but anything goes wrong ex- drug reaction, anaphylactic shock, toxicity then person will land up in to serious problems.

OTC - Over the counter medicines can be purchased without prescription. This is to save time and money and get relief immediately. Reasons for self medication include mild illness, previous experience of good results by some medicines. 

Sources of information: Following are different sources where people get information like pharmacists, friends, relatives, TV advertisement, books, internet, person who works in pharmacy. Stationery shop, pan shop supermarket, Karana shop (grocery shop) also provide simple medicines. Common medicines used for self medication are analgesics, antipyretics, antacids, anti-diarrheal, antidepressants, anti anxiety (sleeping pills), anti-allergic, anti emetics, eye drops, ear drops, nasal drops, skin ointment, antibiotics, steroids, vitamins, tonics, protein preparations.

Conditions treated by self medication - Headache, body ache, cough cold, constipation, loose motion, acidity, generalized weakness, sleep lessens (insomnia), fever. Skin infection, joint pain, burns, menstrual pain, insect bites etc.

Advantages of self medication -

- It helps to prevent and treat symptoms and ailments that don’t require a doctor.
- Patient gets immediate relief. This reduces the pressure of medical services where health care. Services are not available and insufficient.
- Increase the availability of health care in rural area or remote areas, hilly areas.
- Patient gets control over the chronic disease.
- Good for Patient wellness and productivity.
- Economic improvement for employer.
- Cost saving and time saving to health care of the people.
Disadvantages of self medication –
Once medicines are entering human body, get absorbed rapidly. At the same time medicine gets sold rapidly through a, powerful marketing and no or less control over medicine. They are used and miss used and over used for different type of illness.

e.g. Taking pain killers for long time out consultation of doctor and out knowing the cause of headache.

e.g. Paracetamol is antipyretic and analgesic which is used in large doses can cause liver problems (toxicity).

e.g. Major problem or disadvantages of self medication is emergence of human pathogen resistance microorganisms worldwide particularly in developing countries, where antibiotics are often used and available without prescription. Its irrational use increases the risk of adverse reactions. And person may develop resistance to particular antibiotics, hypersensitivity of drug withdrawal symptoms and temporary masking of disease can delay correct diagnosis. Some medicines are banned in the market & user doesn’t know and they go on consuming.

Conclusion:
Many research studies show that self medication is a global phenomenon. This article is focused on self medication, over the counter, their use, reasons, names of the medicines commonly used, common and minor illness to use self medication. If person using self medication have sufficient knowledge about medicine it is well and good (Dose, time side effect). But at the same time person is having lack of information about particular medicine it can cause serious reactions. E.g. skin problem hypersensitivity, allergy, anaphylactic shock, and then the person family members will land up in serious problem. The ratio of educated people who are using the self medication is high compared to illiterate people. Self medication in India is very much in use especially rural area. Government and health authorities need to concentrate towards this area.\textsuperscript{8,9,10,11,12,13,14}

Recommendations:
Drug regulatory health authorities have to inspect and dedicate time to raise awareness of people general on pro and cons responsible for self medication. So that they can improve their attitude towards practice of self medication.

• It can be added in the student’s curriculum also.
• Health education of peoples, students, pharmacists. They should be actively involved in health education.
• This may help in including the practice of self medication.
• Need for strict law enforcement to limit purchase of medicines out prescription.
• Pharmacists should be made aware about media legal aspects, consumer’s protection act and human rights about self medication.
• Improving communication and improving a referral system between pharmacists and physicians is an important issue.

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