

## Self Medication – Abuse more than use

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Dear Madam,

Through your esteemed journal I would like to put light on one of the most prevailing problem in not only our country but all developing nations and some developed nations of the world i.e. self-medication. Self-medication is defined as obtaining and consuming drugs without the advice of a physician either for diagnosis, prescription or surveillance of treatment<sup>1</sup>. Selfcare, being a widespread phenomenon, is practiced depending on cultural and societal norms. This is practiced not only in the lower socio-economic class but also the elite class. These can be in the form of either traditional herbal remedies or prescription based medication. It is seen that in order to treat minor illnesses, self-medication is an inexpensive alternative to visiting a healthcare facility.

The factors that contribute to this practice are the time constraints due to the busy lifestyle; costly medication; unstable economic and political conditions; lack of healthcare facilities in the rural areas; females are restricted either due to the fact that they are a part of an overtly religious family or the feudal society; preference to homemade remedies and faith healers; and psychological dependence on certain drugs<sup>2,3</sup>. The adverse reactions of self-medication are increased due to the unchecked

allowance of non-prescription drugs by pharmacies and their extensive use by the public. Potential risks of self-medication practices include: incorrect self-diagnosis, delays in seeking medical advice when needed, infrequent but severe adverse reactions, dangerous drug interactions, incorrect manner of administration, incorrect dosage, incorrect choice of therapy, masking of a severe disease and risk of dependence and abuse. The type of drugs most frequently used for self-medication were antibiotics (31%), analgesics (23%), antipyretics (18%), antiulcerics (9%), cough suppressants (8%), multivitamins (6%), and anthelmintics (4%)<sup>4</sup>.

The prevalence in Pakistan is around 51%, based on studies<sup>5</sup>. The majority of the drug sellers are unqualified and lack information on the indications, contraindications and the associated side effects of the drugs being dispensed, putting the lives of the public at risk. Other developing countries face the similar situation as that in Pakistan with widespread availability of prescription medication such as antibiotics, analgesics, sedatives and even corticosteroid ointments over the counter<sup>6</sup>.

In order to regulate self medication, the government as well as the private institutions should take certain steps. These steps consist of carrying out awareness campaigns regarding implications of self medication in hospitals such as seminars for pharmacists, and making advertisements for the general public; providing better and low cost medical facilities especially in the rural areas; making prescriptions necessary for buying medicines.

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