

Medicines, professionals and health care services

In recent years, medicament utilization studies were increasing in quantity, quality and diversity. This is not only due to the pivotal role pharmaceuticals play in the control of some diseases but also to the need of reviewing their utilization in the consumer societies as well as from the perspective of how much they weigh on the family budget, especially of the poor.

An emerging – and qualifying – field of studies and action in this context covers the interface between industry and society represented by the commercial interests of the pharmaceutical industry on one hand and the reaction of society to the information this industry disseminates, be it through advertisements in the lay media, be it in congresses and in the offices of specialists or still in form of package inserts and leaflets. The impact this information causes becomes evident in the power the users ascribe to medicaments, going far beyond of what clinical assays and treatment protocols recommend and entering the cultural sphere.

In this sense, the role of physicians, pharmacists and dentists is being studied, problemized and reexamined. Today it is accepted that, the same way the utilization of medicaments by the population is influenced by extra-scientific values, the behavior of the health professionals suffers the influence of some symbolic values when deciding upon using or not pharmaceuticals and about how to use them. However, the prominent position of the anthropological dimension of our days apart, the creation of legal norms and regulations as well as auditing and punishment of infringers have counted on increasing theoretical and practical encouragement from the professionals.

The qualitative approaches aimed at explaining the phenomena carry with them the concerns with the quality of the health services. Therefore, for turning the formulation of these areas more efficient, one must make use of the tools epidemiology and statistics are offering to increase the benefits medicaments can bring and to reduce the harm they can cause. The cross-sectional approach used in the medicine utilization studies is aimed at analyzing user profiles and utilization patterns but also at comprehending the perception of health professionals about consumer relations.

Rational use of medicaments is thus structured upon multiple disciplinary spheres and requires joint efforts.

These are the subjects being approached by the authors who contributed to this special issue. When aiming to contribute to the design of health policies in our country, one cannot ignore problems like drug shortage in the public health system, difficult access do essential drugs for the poor due to prices unaffordable for them and consequently non-adherence to the medication prescribed by a physician or dentist. Production of generic drugs and establishment a network of pharmacies selling medicaments at affordable prices were among the strategies employed in an effort to meet the countless needs in this field in our country.

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Guest editor