

2014

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Recommended Citation

Ismael, Suleiman and Rodriguez, Mikaela, "Dietary Supplement Education in a Primary Care Setting" (2014). *Family Medicine Clerkship Student Projects*. 26.
<https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/fmclerk/26>

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Dietary Supplement Education in a Primary Care Setting

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EMMC Center for Family Medicine, Bangor, Maine

Rotation 3, July-Aug 2014

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Problem Identification

- ▶ More than 50% of American adults use at least one dietary supplement (1)
- ▶ Despite their popularity, patients and physicians are often unaware of the limited regulation of these products as well as their potential risks and benefits (2)
- ▶ During our rotation at the Center for Family Medicine in Bangor, Maine, we observed several patients asking about the efficacy and safety of various supplements
- ▶ Also, many patients wanted to avoid taking pharmacological drugs and inquired about any “natural” treatments to their illnesses
- ▶ The residents we worked with expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to discuss dietary supplements with their patients
- ▶ In the overwhelming majority of cases, if a patient did not bring up supplement use on their own, the providers never inquired about it

Public Health Consequences

- ▶ American consumers spent \$26.7 billion on dietary supplements on 2009 (1)
- ▶ Supplements may pose significant risks, including potential supplement-drug interactions, side effects, and other adverse effects, and may incur unnecessary costs (3)
- ▶ 72% of patients do not report to their doctors that they are using alternative medicines/herbal remedies (4)
- ▶ More than 15 million adults are at risk for interactions between prescription medications and herbal supplements or high-dose vitamins (5)
- ▶ We personally observed patients at EMMC express a lack of understanding of the efficacy and safety profile of dietary supplements they were taking.

Community Perspective

- ▶ *“I usually use the first thing that pops up on Google because it seems like if it is the most popular it might be the most helpful”* - patient at EMMC Center for Family Medicine, when asked where she goes for information on dietary supplements
- ▶ *“I drink herbal teas to treat my anxiety and insomnia but I don’t mention them to my doctor because I feel like I know more from my own internet research than they will.”* - patient at EMMC Center for Family Medicine

Community Perspective

- ▶ *“I try to use UptoDate but it usually does not have any information about the supplements my patients ask about. I feel like I don’t have any alternate resources.” - Name Withheld, family medicine resident, when asked what resources she uses for information on dietary supplements*
- ▶ *“The majority of my patients are taking at least 1 dietary supplement when I first see them. I have them bring in all of their pill bottles for everything they take because they otherwise often forget to include supplements. I also ask them why they are taking each one and find that they often do not know.” - Name Withheld, an integrative medicine provider in the Bangor community*

Intervention and Methodology

- ▶ Goal: (1) Educate family practice physicians on the importance of discussing supplement use with their patients, and (2) provide an easy to use resource with evidenced-based information with which to do so
- ▶ We talked with several of the faculty and residents at the Center for Family Medicine to determine how to best fulfill this need
 - ▶ They preferred having one comprehensive resource rather than several options
 - ▶ They preferred the information to be disseminated in a simple manner, due to the nature of their busy schedules (we were told brochures and Powerpoint presentations would be too cumbersome) thus we decided to create a brief, single-page informational flyer
- ▶ We looked at several online resources, and decided to use Natural Standard, due to it's comprehensiveness, ease of use, availability on the EMMC network, and because it is recommended by the American Academy of Family Physicians and World Health Organization

The Flyer

- ▶ We produced a single page flyer indicating the importance of addressing patients' dietary supplement use and how to access information about supplements by using the Natural Standard database



DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

Your patients are using them.

More than half of American adults use dietary supplements. Some of these products have important side effects and medication interactions. If you want to know more about a supplement, try using **Natural Standard**, a database recommended by the AAFP and WHO. Natural Standard provides high-quality, evidence-based information about dietary and herbal supplements including, but not limited to: scientific evidence, indications, safety, side effects and medication interactions.

You can also search by medical condition, (e.g. migraine) to learn about current evidence for or against supplements used for that condition.

This subscription service is available on the EMMC network. Visit **naturalstandard.com** on any EMMC computer and you will automatically be logged in.

More than 50% of Americans take dietary supplements

Ginkgo potentiates anti-platelet and anti-coagulant medications

Echinacea may decrease the action of corticosteroids

St. John's wort interferes with OCP efficacy

Over 70% of patients do not tell their doctors about their use of alternative medicine and herbal remedies.

ASK YOUR PATIENTS ABOUT SUPPLEMENTS

Results and Response

- ▶ Copies of the flyer were printed and delivered to 30 residents, 6 faculty physicians, and 14 mid-level providers at the EMMC Center for Family Medicine
- ▶ The flyer was emailed to the Medical Director of the residency program and to the community health team
- ▶ The information was well received, and initial responses have been positive
 - ▶ *“I will definitely use this” - Name Withheld, family medicine resident*
 - ▶ *“This makes it easy to look up evidence-based medicine - quick and efficient. I’ll use it the next time a patient asks me about something like black cohosh.” - Name Withheld, DO Family Medicine Resident*

Effectiveness and Limitations

- ▶ Effectiveness (to be done in the future):
 - ▶ In order to evaluate effectiveness of the project, we would survey residents in 3 months to determine:
 - ▶ If there has been an increase in supplement discussion with their patients since receiving the flyer
 - ▶ How useful and practical they found the Natural Standard database
- ▶ Limitations:
 - ▶ Time constraints - unable to determine effectiveness as listed above
 - ▶ Would have been helpful to gather baseline data of the pre-intervention rate of supplement discussion at patient office visits

Recommendations for Future Projects

- ▶ Make informational slides on most commonly used supplements to display on the waiting room TV screens
- ▶ Hang flyers in waiting room and exam rooms to encourage patients to talk to their provider about their supplement use
- ▶ Survey providers to determine what percentage of the time they remember to ask about supplements when creating the medication list
- ▶ Implement a way to automatically print off a patient information sheet when a supplement is added to the EMR.
- ▶ Create a direct link to Natural Standard or similar database in the EMR
- ▶ Follow up with providers at the practice as discussed in Effectiveness slide

References

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