International comparison of educational systems for OTC drugs in pharmacy schools

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Abstract

Objectives : Training of pharmacists to give suitable information about self-medication to the general public has become essential.　However, we feel that the educational system and current educational tools are not adequate to ensure the proper teaching of issues related to non-prescription (OTC: over-the-counter) drugs in Japanese pharmacy schools.　The purpose of this work was to clarify the current status of the educational system for OTC drugs in Japan.

Methods : We investigated and compared the educational systems for OTC drugs in Japanese and foreign pharmacy schools through questionnaires and the Internet, respectively, to identify specific issues related to pharmacists' education about proper drug use in self-medication.

Results : Our questionnaires and inquiries about OTC drugs revealed that the USA pharmacy schools on average have more than 45 lecture hours on OTC drugs. However, only 30% of Japanese pharmacy schools have OTC drugs education, and even in the ones that do have it, the average number of lecture hours was only 9.　There were big differences in the OTC educational system between Japanese and the USA pharmacy schools.　We suggest these differences are largely due to differences in social background, such as medical insurance systems and the responsibilities of community pharmacists.

Conclusion : We conclude that the Japanese educational system for OTC drugs has room for improvement as to both volume and contents.　To improve Japanese OTC education, we suggest that a universal curriculum guideline for OTC drug lectures should be developed; this might help to reduce national medical costs.

Keywords : Non-prescription (OTC) drugs, Educational systems for OTC drugs, self-medication, medical referral