

Use of over-the-counter medicines by patients with the common cold symptoms in Japan

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ABSTRACT

Purpose:

This study was conducted to clarify the actual use of over-the-counter (OTC) medications for the development of the ideal method of providing information on their appropriate use to consumers.

Design:

Descriptive study.

Methods:

The study was performed in two hospitals in Tokyo. All participants were older than 15 years of age, had common cold symptoms for which they were consulting a physician for the first time, and gave informed consent. The diagnosis of each patient with common cold symptoms was verified based on medical records.

Results:

Two hundred and eleven participants completed the questionnaire. Sixty-two percent had used OTC medications for common cold symptoms before the consultation. The items that they read on the labels or in the package inserts before OTC medication use were: "Usage directions" (84%); "Dosage instructions" (88%); "Contraindications" (54%); and "Consult a physician or pharmacist before use" (15%). Forty-two percent of OTC medication users with influenza consulted a physician more than 2 days after symptom onset.

Conclusion:

The study found that few OTC medication users read "Contraindications" and "Consult a physician or pharmacist before use" and that about half with influenza waited more than 2 days after symptom onset before consulting a physician. These problems in the OTC medication use of consumers could result from inconspicuous labels text, insufficient information on appropriate use on the label and in the package, lack of knowledge of the importance of reading labels and package inserts information, and infrequent seeking advice from medical professionals. Therefore, further studies will be necessary to investigate the ideal method of providing information on appropriate use to consumers.

Key words: over-the-counter medication, self-medication, common cold, influenza, actual use