

Self-Medication in Zambia: Proposed Communication Strategies to Combat the Practice

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This study was on Self-medication in Zambia and proposing communication strategies to combat the practice, which is associated with various negative consequences, such as inappropriate use of antibiotics, development of drug resistant strains of micro-organisms, inaccurate diagnosis by health professionals because disease symptoms get concealed, use of wrong medications, delays in seeking medical advice, incorrect dosages, and use of drugs which are not safe to mix.

The study looked at the extent of the practice, the reasons why people self-medicate, how much people know about the dangers associated with self-medication, and the role of communication in combating it.

The methodological approach blended both qualitative and quantitative methods, with the qualitative component involving document reviews and key informant interviews with relevant personnel, while the quantitative component involved administering questionnaires to randomly selected participants in two purposively selected districts, Lusaka and Chibombo.

On prevalence, the study found that 40.4% respondents practiced self-medication. On the reasons, most people cited quick relief (33.3%), previous illness experience (28.6%), lack of time to visit health facilities (21.4%), illness considered not serious enough (9.5%), lack of drugs at health facilities (4.8%), and lack of transport money (2.4%). On how much people knew about the dangers of self-medication, majority (77.1%) said they were aware of its consequences while 22.9% said they were not. On the role of communication strategies to combat the practice, the study found that, the strategies cannot achieve much if they are not properly implemented. It was found that they were there but not effectively implemented and hence not impactful.

It is recommended therefore, that there should be robust messaging strategies targeted at people of all age groups; Intensified campaigns against the sale of prescription medicines; Debate contests about the dangers of self-medication; Printing and distributing various mass media materials cheaply or for free in various busy places; Stiffening regulations on distribution and sale of medicines; Sending anti-self-medication messages on cell phones; and use of the internet, especially the social media networks; The media should give prominence to self-medication issues and the importance of visiting a health facility when sick; and Newspapers should provide columns for those writing about self-medication dangers. To other researchers, there is need to undertake more studies in this area.

Keywords: Self-medication, Diagnosis, Disease, Medical practitioner, Communication, Drug, Drug abuse