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**A STUDY ON IMPACT OF PRESCRIPTION TO OTC SWITCHES OF PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS:
RETAIL CHEMIST PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

Over-the-counter medicine is also known as OTC or nonprescription medicine. Prescription to OTC switch refers to the transfer of proven prescription drugs (Rx) to non-prescription, over-the-counter (OTC) status. Due to lifestyle changes common disorders like frequent headache, allergy, common cold, constipation, backache, acidity, chronic fatigue are on arise. Due to proven safety of these medicines, consumers or patient purchase it directly from retail chemist. Many times retail pharmacist play very crucial role in dispensing of OTC drugs to consumer or patient, especially when they are not aware of medicines or brands available in the market. The present study was focused on impact of switches from prescription to OTC from retail chemist perspective. The survey indicated that after switching from prescription to OTC the sales of the product has been increased, most of the retail chemists believed that advertisement is the major source of information about OTC products to the consumers or patients and it also helps to increase the sales of the product.

Introduction

Over-the-counter medicine is also known as OTC or nonprescription medicine. All these terms refer to medicine that you can buy without a prescription. They are safe and effective when you follow the directions on the label and as directed by your health care professional. ^[1] These medicines are commonly used to treat symptoms of common illnesses. Prescription to OTC switch refers to the transfer of proven prescription drugs (Rx) to non-prescription, over-the-counter (OTC) status. For a medicine to be granted OTC status, it must have a wide safety margin and be effective, and must bear understandable labeling to ensure proper use. Prescription to OTC switch is a data-driven, scientifically rigorous, and highly regulated process that allows consumers to have OTC access to a growing range of medicines. To make safe and effective drugs, the role of new technology also plays very important role. The result will be that new "switch"

submissions will be approved, such as for hypertension, and drugs previously rejected for an Rx-to-OTC switch, such as statins, will now become approvable^[2]. Forces impacting on the movement of prescription drugs to OTC status include the market expansion motives of the pharmaceutical industry, a national trend toward deregulation, the growth of the self-help movement among consumers, and cost-containment efforts by the health care industry^[3].

The size of the OTC market has been constantly growing with a CAGR of 2.7 % (2009-2014). So most of the pharmaceutical companies are looking for these new area for the growth of their market especially after patent expiry.^[4]

In India OTC products have 33% of market share which is continuously growing at a faster rate. In comparison with the US and Chinese OTC market, it grew with CAGRs of 4.3%.^[2]

The various segments of OTC drugs such as Vitamins & Minerals, Gastrointestinal, and Cough Cold & Allergy etc. are the major reasons for the popularity of the OTC drug market^[5].

Reasons for Switching Prescription to OTC

The pharmaceutical drugs which become off patent yield less profit for pharmaceutical companies. These drugs are also called as blockbuster drugs. Pharmaceutical companies make strategies to avoid this off patent process by extending the product life cycle of Rx products include launching new indications, formulation variants, extended/controlled released versions; switching users across to a new, improved version of the product, or the option of releasing a company-owned or licensed generic^[6]. Some or all of these strategies are likely to be assessed by most companies with expiring patents. Another strategy though is to switch the product from prescription (Rx) to over-the-counter (OTC). An OTC switch offers an opportunity to rejuvenate the established brand and to make maximum gain through it. From literature study it was noted that switching from the prescription to OTC market may occur as a response to potential generic competition^[7].

The appeal of this opportunity is to introduce a new OTC treatment to consumers, often with superior benefits versus existing OTC treatments available. New non-switch OTC brands are usually launched without existing brand awareness and need years of substantive promotional investment to gain the advantage that Rx heritage lends to OTC switch brands. Changing lifestyle with less exercise (sedentary jobs), taking junk food, consuming addictive products to stay awake on the job for longer hours and eating on the run put more stress on the body which get expressed in the form of psychosomatic disorders like frequent headache, allergy, common cold, constipation, backache, acidity, chronic fatigue etc. which they are trying to manage with Over The Counter (OTC) drugs^[8]. OTC switches can be an important policy

tool for improving public health in drug classes where a significant pro- portion of the population is untreated and where consumers can effectively manage treatment with limited physician supervision ^[9]. Many times retail pharmacist play very crucial role in dispensing of OTC drugs to consumer or patient, especially when they are not aware of drugs or brands available in the market. The present study was undertaken because there is a lot of information available regarding the OTC and prescription markets but the effect of Rx to OTC switches information especially with respect to the retail chemists is not available. So the present study was focused on impact of switches from prescription to OTC from retail chemist perspective.

Objectives of the study: To know the opinion of retail chemists on the Impact of Prescription to OTC Switches of Pharmaceutical products.

Research Methodology

The study was based on non-probability convenience sampling of respondents through a structured questionnaire which contains three types of questions namely multiple choice questions, open ended as well as closed ended questions. In case of closed ended questions respondents were asked to tick the most appropriate answer and in few they were asked to give the order of preference. The nature of study was exploratory study which involved both primary research and secondary research. The primary data was obtained from retail chemists through a self-administered questionnaire. The secondary data was collected from various sources which includes articles published in journals, E-journals and technology data bases. The study was conducted in South India. The total sample size selected for study was 100 retail chemists. Analysis and interpretation of the data has been carried out to deduce the conclusion. The data is presented in the form of tables.

Results and Discussions

Table: 1.Reasons for increased OTC products usages.

Response	Percentage of respondents
Advertisement	67
Patient's Trust	6
Physician Trust	0
Time saving	0
Low cost	11
Educated Customer's	4
Easy Availability	12

67% of respondents said that advertisement plays an important role in increased OTC usage which was then followed by educated customers (12%).

The low cost of the medicine (11%) has also been attributed as one among the major factor followed by patient trust (6%) and easy availability (4%). Advertisement plays a vital role in increase of OTC usage because of the widespread and easy availability of the information for the end users through various communication systems such as internet, television, newspapers and magazines etc.

Table 1: Effect of shifting in terms of sales.

Response	Percentage of respondents
Increased	62
Decreased	9
No change	29

62% of the respondents said that shifting from prescription to OTC resulted in increase in sales. 29% of the respondents feel that there is no change in terms of sales because of these switches and 9% of the respondents said that the sales have been decreased. So, overall switching from prescription to OTC has a major effect in terms of sales (either increased or decreased). The success of the OTC product majorly depends on its promotional activities.

Table 2: Source of information about the OTC products for consumers.

Response	Percentage of respondents
Advertisement	76
Marketing Executives	0
Magazines	3
Consumers(relatives or friends)	21

Most of the respondents 76% said the advertisement is the major source of information about the OTC products for consumers. A small number 3% said magazines are the source of information and 21% of the respondents feel that consumers are the source of information for the OTC products. So, according to the survey advertisement play a major role in providing the information about the OTC products and it is one of the easiest sources of communication for reaching the end consumers.

Table 3: Safety Information is sufficient for direct use for a consumer.

Response	Percentage of respondents
Yes	65
No	4
Don't Know	31

65% of the respondents feel that the safety information provided by the OTC products is sufficient for direct use for consumers whereas only 4% of the respondents told that the safety information is not sufficient for the direct use of a consumer.31% of respondents said that they don't know whether the safety information provided is sufficient or not.

As these OTC products do not need any prescription or supervision of physicians, pharmaceutical companies should provide detail information about safety, precautions and storage conditions.

Table 4: Main factor affecting the choice of a drug by the user.

Response	Percentage of respondents
Quality	8
Cost	32
Brand Name	58
Suggestions by previously used consumers	2

Majority of the respondents 58% said that brand name is the one of the major factor that affects the choice of a product by consumer.32% of the respondents feels that cost will influence choice of the product then followed by the quality 8%, suggestions by previously used consumers 2%. Brand name gives a distinct identity to a product in the minds of consumers which will easily differentiate from the competitor products. So brand name plays an important role in choosing an OTC product by the consumer.

Table 5: Experience of Patients suffering from side effects caused by OTC products

Response	Percentage of respondents
Never	100
Once a day	0
Once a month	0
Not affected	0

All the respondents 100% told that they didn't come across any patients suffering from side effects after using the OTC products. The above analysis indicates that the safety profile of the OTC products are very well established and approved by FDA and it adequate for the direct use of the products without a prescription.

Table 6: Effect of switches on prescription flow pattern from physicians

Response	Percentage of respondents
Increased	4
Decreased	28
Not Effected	68

Most of the respondents 68% feel that the switch doesn't affected the prescription flow pattern from physicians.28%of the respondents told that the prescription products after switching to the OTC the prescription flow from physicians was decreased. Where as few respondents 4% said that after switching to OTC the prescription flow has been increased. Overall the switch from prescription to OTC doesn't have a major effect on the prescription flow from the physicians.

Table 8: Seeking guidance on OTC drug

Response	Percentage of respondents
Yes	80
No	20

Majority of the respondents 80% told that the consumers ask for recommending or advice on OTC product for their intended use. Few respondents 20% said that the consumers will ask the product directly by brand name.Due to stiff competition in the market, hundreds of OTC brands are available for various minor diseases. The end users many times get confused among brand names and company names. Many times for the minor health problems and due of lack of information about the OTC products they seek guidance from the retail chemist.

Table9: Preference of choice.

Response	Percentage of respondents
Branded Product	70
Generic Product	30

While recommending a product for the consumers 70% of respondents told that they will prefer the branded product, whereas 30% of the respondents said that they will prefer the generic product.

Table 10: Loss of sales because of switch

Response	Percentage of respondents
Yes	20
No	60
Don't Know	20

Majority of the respondents 60% said that the switches were not affected the sales of the product. 20% of the respondents told that the switches effected the sales of some products, Remaining 20% told that they don't know the effects on sales after these switches. Out of that 20% respondents who told that switches effected the sales they informed that the some products lost it sales after switching to the OTC category.

Table 11: Preference for ailments according to the usage of OTC products(1/2/3/4/5/6/7)

Parameters	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fever	33	15	26	25	1	0	0
Cough/Cold	20	14	31	33	2	0	0
Headache	32	33	20	14	1	0	0
Acidity	1	2	2	9	77	8	0
Pain	13	37	21	19	10	8	0
Digestive	0	0	0	0	8	91	1
Skin Disorders	0	0	0	0	0	1	99

33% of the respondents told that the fever is the most common condition where the most of the consumers will ask for the OTC products. 32% of the respondents told headache and 20% of respondents told that cold/cough is the common conditions where the consumers will ask for OTC products. Pain 13% and Acidity 1% are the least preferred conditions for the OTC products. Skin disorder is the condition where most of the consumers won't prefer for OTC products.

Conclusion

In present scenario, the pharmaceutical companies are using various strategies to increase their market growth and to minimize the critical sales loss. Based on the primary and secondary research the following conclusions were drawn:-The survey indicated that after switching from prescription to OTC the sales of the product has been increased, most of the retail chemists believed that advertisement is the major source of information about OTC products to the consumers and it also helps to increase the sales of the product. It appears from survey that most of the retail chemists are of an opinion that the safety information available with the OTC products is sufficient for direct use and they told that in their experience they didn't came across any patients with the side effects after using the OTC products. The survey indicated that fever, headache, cold/cough, pain are the main ailments where there is a lot of potential for the switch to OTC products. It also confirms that brand name place a key role in choosing the OTC product. Even though switching helps in boosting the sales of the most products but some of the products lost its sales after switching. Overall switching from prescription to OTC will help the pharmaceutical companies to improve their sales through effective advertisement.

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