

Knowledge and practices of usage of paracetamol as an over-the-counter medicine among adult patients attending a selected hospital setting

L. P. T. D. Wijetunga¹, M. R. F. Sahna¹, K. M. Wijesooriya¹, A. Y. Anuththara¹,
S. D. Amarasuriya²

¹*Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka*

²*Department of Medical Humanities, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka*

Paracetamol is a commonly used over-the-counter (OTC) analgesic and antipyretic medication. Unintentional overdosing of paracetamol following self-medication is a prevalent and concerning issue, as it can cause serious adverse effects, including hepatotoxicity. Public understanding of its safe dosage, frequency of administration and potential drug interactions remains inadequate, as suggested by previous studies. This study aims to evaluate the knowledge, usage patterns and practices related to paracetamol consumption among adult patients attending a selected hospital setting. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted at the Outpatient Department of the District Hospital Maligawatte. Using systematic sampling, 130 adults aged 20-60 years were recruited. Data were gathered using a pretested, interviewer-administered questionnaire, validated by experts. The questionnaire explored socio-demographic details, reasons for paracetamol use, dosage practices, and knowledge regarding safety and maximum recommended doses. Knowledge scores were classified into “Satisfactory” or “Poor” categories. Data analysis was performed using SPSS. The participants were predominantly female (63.8%), with a mean age of 40.2 years. Overall, 56.2% demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of paracetamol use, with most correctly identifying the recommended 6-hour dosing interval. However, only 17% were aware of the correct maximum daily dose. Paracetamol was primarily used to manage fever (84.6%) and headaches (83.1%). No statistically significant association was observed between knowledge levels and age, gender or education. Although the majority of the participants demonstrated satisfactory overall knowledge and reported appropriate dosing intervals, the awareness of critical safety parameters, particularly the maximum daily dose, was notably poor. This poses a significant risk of adverse effects, given the widespread use of the medication. Targeted public education, clearer product labelling and routine counselling by healthcare professionals are warranted to mitigate preventable harm.

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