

AVAILABILITY OF DRUG SAMPLES IN OUTPATIENT CLINICS: OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

Floriane Darbon¹, Michael Jaatoul¹, Suzanne Atkinson¹, Jean-François Bussières^{1,2}
¹Pharmacy department and Pharmacy Practice Research Unit, CHU Sainte-Justine, Montréal, QC, Canada
² Faculté de pharmacie, Université de Montréal, Montréal, QC, Canada

BACKGROUND

In Canada, the Food and Drugs Act (FDA) does not allow direct to consumer advertising for prescription drugs. At the hospital, drug samples are generally prohibited for hospitalized patients but tolerated for outpatient clinics. Distribution of drug sample by physicians may compromise the optimal drug-use process in hospitals and the community.

PURPOSE

The objective of this study is to estimate the number of drug samples available in outpatient clinics in a teaching hospital in 2016 and to compare these numbers with 2007, 2009, and 2012.



METHODS

- ◆ This is a cross-sectional observational study in a 500 beds teaching hospital in Québec.
- ◆ The inventory was conducted by 2 research assistants during 2 weeks each year through unannounced visits.
- ◆ The total number of units (dispensed format/drug) and doses of drug samples were calculated in 2007, 2009, 2012 and 2016.
- ◆ We calculated a ratio of units of drug samples per patient visits to estimate the potential patient exposure.

RESULTS

- ◆ Drug samples were found in 11 locations in 2016 out of 15 storage areas.
- ◆ All of the locations were intended for ambulatory patients (outpatient clinics and day centers). No drug samples were found in inpatient care units.
- ◆ 5.6 % (5298/93881) of doses were expired.
- ◆ 75% (70267/93881) of doses were not listed on the hospital drug formulary



Table 1. Ratio of # dose of drug samples per patient-visit

	2007	2009	2012	2016
Units (n)	14207	7949	6989	7317
Doses (n)	78941	74973	91000	93881
Visits (n)	195526	195937	222168	237474
Ratio # doses of drug samples/pt-visits	0.40	0.38	0.41	0.40

Table 2. Profile of drug samples in a mother-child teaching hospital in 2007, 2009,2012 and 2016

	2007		2009		2012		2016	
Locations (number of location in 2016)	Drug samples doses (n)	Drug samples doses per patient-visits* (n)	Drug samples doses (n)	Drug samples doses per patient-visits* (n)	Drug samples doses(n)	Drug samples doses per patient-visits* (n)	Drug samples doses(n)	Drug samples doses per patient-visits* (n)
Pneumology (2)	19553	5,16	4384	0,88	7491	0,73	15305	2,78
Obstetric-gynecology(2)	16383	0,52	3361	0,12	5142	0,17	6675	0,23
Pediatrics (3)	11977	1,26	6235	0,67	6557	0,57	15291	1,83
Dermatology (1)	9131	1,49	44465	5,53	50674	6,06	46729	4,22
Otolaryngology(1)	6056	0,64	7676	0,79	6371	0,52	1536	0,13
Gastroenterology (1)	2450	0,45	1358	0,23	4019	0,66	695	0,10
Dyalisis (o)	2114	1,61	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00
Endocrinology (1)	1900	0,94	84	0,04	200	0,08	681	0,20
Adolescent medicine (1)	1592	0,64	174	0,06	3032	1,02	5031	1,54
Emergency (o)	1482	0,02	612	0,01	0	0,00	0	0,00
Allergy (1)	1439	0,41	0	0,00	4938	2,10	281	0,05
Ophthalmology (1)	1379	0,09	3662	0,26	752	0,05	1001	0,07
Urology (o)	1050	0,25	119	0,03	357	0,09	0	0,00
Neurology (o)	653	0,12	165	0,03	269	0,04	0	0,00
Dentistry (o)	747	0,12	219	0,03	1198	0,17	0	0,00
Development (o)	433	0,17	1272	0,45	0	0,00	0	0,00
Diabetes (o)	348	0,13	969	0,35	0	0,00	0	0,00
Orthopedics (1)	142	0,01	90	0,01	0	0,00	656	0,03
Daycare (o)	88	0,02	126	0,02	0	0,00	0	0,00
Neonatology (o)	24	0,03	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0
Total (15)	78941	NC	74972	NC	91000	NC	93881	NC

NC: the total ratio was not calculated

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

- ◆ The ratio of doses of drug samples per patient visit has remained stable over the last 10 years ; however, the total number of doses of drug samples has reached a peak in 2016 with 93 881 doses
- ◆ In Canada, the distribution of drug samples by pharmaceutical representatives is still allowed and tolerated in most hospitals ; regulatory authorities could proscribe their distribution within public healthcare facilities but the current position of both pharmacy and medical colleges still tolerate them;
- ◆ While we believe the majority of drug samples do not contribute to optimal drug use (e.g. poor documentation of their dispensation in medical chart by prescriber, misinformation of community pharmacists for drug samples dispensed at the hospital, etc.), it is difficult to proscribe their presence in a large healthcare facility where numerous prescribers and pharmaceutical representatives walk in.
- ◆ Drug samples are quite prevalent in hospitals in Canada. Pharmacists and all stakeholders should be aware of their presence when they treat a patient and complete medication reconciliation.