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Abstract (poster session)

Antibiotic sales in rural and urban pharmacies in Northern Viet Nam: an observational study

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Background: In Vietnam, antibiotics can only be sold with a prescription. But previous studies have shown that there is a high inappropriate use of antibiotics in the community in Vietnam. The majority of antibiotics are sold without a prescription, often for acute upper respiratory infections that do not need antibiotic treatment. The problem of irrational use of antibiotics should be minimized as it drives resistance development. Better understanding of practices and economic incentives of antibiotic dispensing is needed to design effective interventions to reduce inappropriate antibiotic use. **Objectives:** This study aims to assess the current practices and economic profitability of antibiotic sales for rural and urban pharmacies in northern Vietnam. **Method:** This cross-sectional study used both quantitative and qualitative techniques. All drug sales were observed and recorded for three days at thirty private pharmacies (15 urban, 15 rural). Pharmacy staffs were interviewed by a semi-structured questionnaire and this was followed by in-depth interviews of drugstore owners and drug sellers. **Results:** In total 2953 drug sale transactions (2083 urban and 870 rural) were observed. 24% (499/2083) of the urban transactions contained antibiotics and 29.5% (257/870) of the rural transactions. Antibiotics contributed 13.4% in urban and 18.7% in rural to the total sales of pharmacies. Most antibiotics were sold without a prescription: 88% in urban and 91% in rural pharmacies. The most frequent reported reason for buying antibiotics in urban area was cough (31.6%) and fever in the rural area (21.7%). The three most common sold antibiotics were ampicillin/amoxicillin (29.1%), cephalexin (12.2%) and azithromycin (7.3%). Consumer often demanded antibiotics without a prescription: 49.7% in urban and 28.2% in rural, respectively. The qualitative data revealed that the knowledge of antibiotics and antibiotic resistance of drug sellers and customer's awareness are low, especially in rural area. **Conclusion:** Suggested areas of improvement are enforcement of regulations and increase knowledge of drug sellers as well as customer's awareness to reduce pressure for drug sellers to dispense antibiotics inappropriately.