Opinion Article

The Potential Effects and Difficulties of Online Pharmacies

Macy Jemmie*

Department of Pharmacy Practice, Auburn University, AL, USA

DESCRIPTION

A web-based pharmacy is an online platform that enables users to buy prescription medications and electronic services, enabling them to quickly receive their medications and services in the convenience of their own homes. Online shopping is becoming a commonplace method of making purchases. Online drug purchases are hardly an exception. Besides its advantages, buying medications outside of the conventional supply chain carries a number of hazards for patient safety. The exact scale of the market is unknown, despite the fact that there are thousands of online pharmacies available. The amount of information on the usage of online pharmacies, the quantity, and the attitudes of those who buy drugs and other health items online are now scarce.

Companies that offer medications online, including those that are prescription-only, are known as Online Pharmacy (OPs). The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) describes this issue, which began in the late 1990s and has since developed to such an extent that it is now considered a "serious public health risk" when it comes to "the sale of unapproved drugs and the illegal sale of approved drugs over the Internet."

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "over 50% of medicines purchased over the internet from sites that conceal their physical address are counterfeit." Counterfeit medicines are considered a global public health crisis". Estimating the amount of pharmaceuticals exchanged, the number of people making purchases online, and the size of this enterprise economically is quite challenging in this situation. Nevertheless, some clinical cases involving medication purchased online and surveys showing researchers successfully purchasing prescription drugs online serve as clear examples of the risk associated with a free market for prescription drugs that turns patients into consumers.

An online pharmacy is a legally or unlawfully operating internet-based retailer that sells prescription drugs. It can function as a stand-alone website, an online division of a physical pharmacy, or a website that unites several pharmacies. In a nutshell, an online pharmacy is a website that provides customers with the option to order, distribute, or dispense drugs online. The quick development of the internet, the rise in digital health, the move away from direct doctor-patient relationships and toward self-diagnosis, the convenience of mail-order commerce, and distance marketing all contribute to the expanding market for online pharmacies.

Digital pharmacies are flawed and carry a number of dangers for payers, providers, and patients, despite their advertised and apparent advantages. Patients are provided with interactions, counseling, access, and security. Online pharmacies have disadvantages despite their potential benefits. The primary drawback is the absence of counseling that one would often find in a traditional brick-and-mortar pharmacy. Twelve percent of respondents to the International Pharmaceutical Federation (IPF) survey said that the major drawback of online pharmacies was the absence of counseling. When a patient picks up a prescription in a typical brick-and-mortar pharmacy, a pharmacist is there to discuss or address any concerns they may have about how to take the medication, any potential side effects, or other hazards.

Substance use problems, self-diagnosis, and self-medication can also result from a lack of counseling. According to the International Pharmaceutical Federation (IPF), "consumers may inappropriately self-diagnose or self-medicate, engage in medically unnecessary behavior or substance abuse, or potentially encounter drug-to-drug interactions, contraindications, or adverse effects, even though online pharmacies provide increased access to medicines and services."

Furthermore, 8% of respondents thought that the main problem with online pharmacies was the absence of in-person interactions. An additional 8% expressed concern about cyber security risks related to online pharmacy. While many point to online pharmacies' accessibility for rural populations as a positive, it's crucial to remember that many rural communities lack dependable internet access.

Correspondence to: Macy Jemmie, Department of Pharmacy Practice, Auburn University, AL, USA, E-mail: jemmie.mac.mj@edu