

The Influence of Self-Medication During Medical School on Medical Students

Hiago Vinícius de França¹
Prof. Helen de Lima²
Evangelical University of Goiás – UniEVANGÉLICA¹²

ABSTRACT

Self-medication is a common practice among medical students, often influenced by advances in academic periods and increased pharmacological knowledge. This study aims to identify aspects related to the influence of academic progress on self-medication for the relief of gastrointestinal symptoms in medical students. A systematic review of the literature was conducted using databases such as PubMed, Scielo, and BVS, covering articles published between 2018 and 2023. The results suggest that students in more advanced stages are more likely to practice self-medication due to the confidence gained from pharmacological knowledge and direct contact with patients. A greater tendency toward self-medication was found among students in the more advanced semesters of the medical course. However, due to the scarcity of studies in the literature on the subject, the finding cannot be considered definitive.

Keywords: Self-medication; Medical students; Pharmacological knowledge; Academic periods.

INTRODUCTION

The word "self-medication" refers to the consumption of medications by the user for the treatment of recognized symptoms; that is, taking medication without a prescription (MALIK et al., 2020).

In modern society, where people are always looking for convenience and speed, they are easily tempted to take "preventive" measures on their own initiative or on the advice of others, ignoring the variety of adverse reactions they are exposed to when using medication without a prescription from a qualified professional. This makes self-medication a double-edged sword due to ignorance of its consequences (BATISTA, 2021).

Among these risks of inappropriate use of medications are drug interactions, adverse reactions, worsening of the symptom that motivated self-medication, aggravation of the underlying disease, iatrogenic effects, and the generation of resistant strains of microorganisms (CUNHA et al., 2019).

Self-medication is very prevalent among health professionals, especially doctors, and is even considered by some authors to be an occupational risk. In the

academic context of medical students, this practice can be influenced by the stage of their course, since progression through the years of training brings with it an expansion of pharmacological and therapeutic knowledge. On the other hand, students in more advanced stages of the course, although still practicing self-medication, tend to do so more consciously, with greater attention to risks and drug interactions. This behavior may be related to greater clinical exposure and a growing understanding of the associated risks (MEJÍA et al., 2018).

METHOD

This study was conducted through a systematic review of the literature, focusing on articles published between 2018 and 2023. The databases used included PubMed, Scielo, and the Virtual Health Library (VHL). The descriptors used were "Self Medication," "Students," and "Medical." The objective was to identify aspects related to the influence of the period spent practicing self-medication on medical students.

RESULTS

Self-medication is a habit deeply rooted in Brazilian culture, prevailing in all generations, from the oldest to the youngest. This habit is so firmly established in everyday life that, in Brazil, approximately 35% of drugs purchased in drugstores are used for medication. University students are motivated to self-medicate mainly due to heavy workloads, greater access to information, interaction with other academics, family influence, psychosocial factors, or changes and adaptations to a new lifestyle. (BRITO et al., 2021).

In Brazil, according to the Brazilian Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (ABIFARMA), approximately 20,000 people die each year as a result of self-medication. Studies conclude that the most frequent users of self-medication are those who have the highest level of information. Previous studies have indicated that self-medication is common among medical students, regardless of the stage of their studies. One study found that around 70% of medical students reported using self-medication during their undergraduate studies. However, further research is needed to

investigate whether there are significant differences between different stages of training (SANTOS et al., 2017; DE MORAES, 2019).

The influence of the stage of study on self-medication may be related to the increase in pharmacological and therapeutic knowledge acquired by students over the years. More advanced students may feel more confident in using medications independently. This increase in confidence may be the result of acquiring specific knowledge and direct contact with patients. It is noteworthy that progression through the years of training is associated with greater self-medication among medical students (SILVA et al., 2019).

The present study corroborates the hypothesis established in the research problem and indicates a correlation between the use of medications without medical advice and the level of knowledge acquired by medical students, represented in the survey by the years of undergraduate study. The practice was statistically higher among third- and fourth-year students and among female students (MORAES, 2018).

However, in the study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, self-medication was a practice observed among university students, including medical students. Despite an overall self-medication rate of 13.6%, medical students were the least likely to use preventive medications against COVID-19, suggesting greater caution compared to other students (TEBET et al., 2023).

The results show that self-medication among medical students occurs due to confidence in self-diagnosis, which is based on perceived signs and symptoms, guiding a search for pathologies and treatments that fit the findings.

CONCLUSION

Self-medication among medical students is a common and potentially dangerous practice, influenced by knowledge acquired during their academic training. The high prevalence of this practice, even among students in advanced stages of their studies, highlights the need for educational policies and awareness of the associated risks, promoting the rational use of medications and the search for appropriate professional

guidance. The scarcity of data on the influence of knowledge on self-medication highlights the importance of further studies on this topic.

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