

Antibiotics and Antibiotic Resistance

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The prevalence of antibiotic self-medication practice and attitude among medical and non-medical students in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia

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Background: Antibiotics self-prescription is a worldwide public health problem due to irrational use. Medical students have the potential to improve the awareness to limit inappropriate use of antibiotics within their communities. In Saudi Arabia this practice seems to be emerging challenge for the healthcare provider. However, the prevalence and the reasons of this malpractice remain unknown within the students' populations.

Objective: Estimate the prevalence of self-prescription with antibiotics; assess the knowledge and attitudes of medical and non-medical students in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia.

Methods: A descriptive, cross-sectional study based on pre-tested questionnaire. Convenient sampling involved face-to-face questionnaire of 235 students was adopted.

Results: In this study, about 58% of students are practicing self-prescription. This substantiates high self-prescription prevalence among medical and non-medical students (50%, 67.3%), respectively. Nearly, 75% of medical students knew that antibiotics are used for bacterial infection compared to only 27% of non-medical students. Confusion about the role of antibiotics in treating infections was the most critical with more than 72% of non-medical students failed to identify that antibiotics do not eradicate viral infections which is alarmingly high. Importantly, 87% of medical students knew that over-use of antibiotics without medical prescription can have adverse effects compared with 58.9% of non-medical students who agreed with this belief. This statement is affected by the specialty ($p < 0.001$). Despite, the awareness of medical students about antibiotics self-medication is unsafe and mal-practice (79.7%), the prevalence of antibiotics self-prescription remains relatively high among all respondents.

Conclusion: The prevalence of self-medication with antibiotics is noticeably high in all students' population. We highly recommend improving the health education to better address this malpractice and improve the students' knowledge, attitudes and awareness towards the antibiotics use and safety.

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