Introduction / Aims

Adherence to medication is important for optimal clinical efficacy. The full benefits of medicines are often not realised because approximately 50% of patients do not take their medicines as prescribed. Improving patients' knowledge about medicines has been shown to improve adherence to medicines. Medicines Information Patient Helplines provide advice to patients in response to their enquiries about medicines. This study aimed to determine whether the advice provided by the helpline had an impact on medication adherence.

Methods

Patients calling four London Medicines Information Helplines during a one month study period in November - December 2013 were asked to participate. Consenting patients were emailed or posted questionnaires immediately after they received an answer to their enquiry. The survey contained questions about patients' medication-taking behaviour and asked them to agree or disagree with various statements (see figure 1).

Results

Out of 82 helpline calls during the study period 40 were included in the study and 17 participants completed the survey (43% response rate).

All patients had started new medicines within the last 6 months and all reported taking their medicines as prescribed up until their medication problem arose, however 8 also said they sometimes miss doses or forget to take their medicine.

On average each patient had 3 medication concerns prior to calling the helpline. The most common medication concerns were regarding side-effects (9/17), interactions (7/17) and how to take medicines (6/17). Four patients were questioning whether they had been given the correct medicine or correct instructions. Six patients had already displayed non-adherent behaviour because of these concerns with 5 patients delaying or missing doses and another self-treating with the incorrect medicine or correct instructions. Six patients had already been shown to improve adherence to medicines.

Nearly all patients (17/18) perceived benefits from using the helpline with the most commonly reported benefit being fast access to information (13/17), a better understanding of their medicines (13/17), followed by knowing their medicine is safe to take (12/17), and knowing where to get supplies (10/17).

A large proportion (13/17) said the advice helped them improve the way they take their medicines (see chart 1).

Conclusion

This study explored the medication adherence behaviour of patients using the Patient Helpline. Patients using the helpline were self-reported to be adherent to medication regimens prior to calling the helpline, however their concerns about medicines that led to their use of the helpline resulted in some non-adherent behaviour and missed doses.

After receiving advice from the helpline a high proportion of patients improved their adherence. This study was limited by the small number of responses and short term follow up and would benefit from a larger study.

References