**Truth telling- A perspective of medical and pharmacy students in the UK**

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**Background**

The requirement for health-care professionals (HCPs) to tell the truth is articulated in the guidance of UK professional bodies.1,2 This study explores undergraduate healthcare students’ views on truth telling.

**Summary of the work**

Fourth year medical and third year pharmacy students undertook an interprofessional on-line ethics exercise. They were faced with the dilemma of whether to tell the truth to parents about the distressing death of their daughter. After the exercise students were asked their views on truth-telling. Ethical approval for the study was obtained.

**Summary of results**

67 medical students and 90 pharmacy students completed the questionnaire (response rate 69%). Key results are presented in the table.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Medicine** | **Pharmacy** |
| **Question** | **Yes** | **No** | **Yes** | **No** |
| Should HCPs always tell truth to patients? | 66 (98.5%) | 1 (1.5%) | 64(71%) | 26(29%) |
| Should HCPs always tell truth to relatives? | 49(73%) | 18(27%) | 50(55%) | 40(45%) |
| Should HCPs always answer patients’ questions honestly? | 65(97%) | 2(3%) | 76(85%) | 13\*(15%) |

\*1 no response

There was a significant difference between all 3 pharmacy and medical student answers (p<0.05). The medical students almost universally stated they would tell the truth to patients. 30% of pharmacy students felt that it is acceptable to withhold the truth in some situations. The medical students commonly gave the importance of maintaining trust as key, with professional duty being the next most commonly given reason for telling the truth. The pharmacists most frequently cited patient rights as a reason the tell the truth, with following professional standards being the next most common reason. Pharmacy students who would not always tell the truth usually gave concerns about doing more harm than good as their reason.

**Discussion and conclusions**

Most pharmacy and medical students would tell the truth to patients. However, many more pharmacy students than medical students stated they would withhold the truth on occasion. The difference was seen despite discussing truth-telling in an on-line interprofessional exercise.

**Take home messages**

There is a difference between pharmacy and medical student approaches to truth-telling. This supports the importance of interprofessional learning as a method of challenging and sharing views.

**References**

1. General Medical Council (2014). *Good medical practice.* Available at: <https://www.gmc-uk.org/-/media/documents/good-medical-practice---english-1215_pdf-51527435.pdf>

<Accessed 26/01/19>

1. General Pharmaceutical Council (2017). *Standards for pharmacy professionals.* Available at: <https://www.pharmacyregulation.org/sites/default/files/standards_for_pharmacy_professionals_may_2017_0.pdf> <Accessed 26/01/19>

Chi-square tests:

Q1 – Chi-square stat 20.244 *p* = 0.000007

Q2 – Chi-square stat 5.0948 *p* = 0.023997

Q3 – Chi-square stat 5.9404 *p* = 0.0147

Q4 – chi-square stat 10.1733 *p* = 0.001425