Abstract

Objective: To determine knowledge of folic acid use for neural tube defect (NTD) prevention and counseling practices among community pharmacists registered in Ohio. Methods: A cross-sectional study was performed on a random sample (n=500) of community pharmacists registered with the Ohio Board of Pharmacy and practicing in Ohio. A survey previously used by researchers to assess folic acid knowledge and practices among samples of other healthcare provider groups in the United States was adapted with permission for this study. The final tool consisted of 28 questions evaluating the knowledge, counseling practices, and demographics of respondents. The cover letter did not reveal the emphasis on folic acid, and surveys were completed anonymously. The university institutional review board deemed the study exempt. Results: Of the 122 pharmacists who completed the survey, 116 (95.1%) knew that folic acid prevents some birth defects. Twenty-eight (22.9%) responded that they "always" or "usually" discuss multivitamins with women of childbearing potential, and 19 (15.6%) responded that they "always" or "usually" discuss folic acid supplements. Some gaps in knowledge specific to folic acid were revealed. While 63.1% of pharmacists selected the recommended dose of folic acid intake for most women of childbearing potential, 13.1% could identify the dose recommended for women who have had a previous NTD-affected pregnancy. Respondents identified continuing education programs, pharmacy journals/magazines, and the Internet as preferred avenues to obtain additional information about folic acid and NTD. Conclusion: This study represents the first systematic evaluation of folic acid knowledge and counseling practices among a sample of pharmacists in the United States. As highly accessible healthcare professionals, community pharmacists can fulfill a vital public health role by counseling women of childbearing potential about folic acid intake. Educational materials may be beneficial in augmenting knowledge of folic acid and facilitating patient education.

Keywords
Pharmacists, Health Knowledge, Attitudes, Practice, Professional Practice, Health promotion, Folic Acid, Neural Tube Defects, United States.