Abstract
Objective: This study aimed to produce current data regarding behavioural aspects of non-prescription (over-the-counter) medicine purchases, in light of changes in the pharmaceutical market and increasing provision of professional services in pharmacies.
Methods: Data were collected in 15 community pharmacies in South-East Queensland, Australia, over 540 hours in five days in August, 2006. The method, previously validated, involved documentation of both observational and interview data. Fifteen trained researchers were stationed in a selected pharmacy each to unobtrusively observe all eligible sales of non-prescription medicines, and, where possible, interview the purchasers post-sale. Non-response was supplemented by observational data and recall by the salesperson. The data included details of the purchase and purchasing behaviour, while new questions addressed issues of topical importance, including customers privacy concerns. A selection of the analyses is reported here. Results: In total, 3470 purchases were documented (135-479 per pharmacy), with customers of 67.5% of purchases (74.7% excluding an outlier pharmacy) participating in the survey. Customers averaged 1.2 non-prescription medicines per transaction. Two-thirds (67.2%) of customers were female, and 38.8% of the customers were aged 31-45 years. Analgesics and respiratory medicines accounted for two-thirds of the sales data (33.4% and 32.4%, respectively). Intended-brand purchases comprised 71% of purchases (2004/2824); in-store substitution then occurred in 8.8% of these cases, mainly following recommendations by pharmacy staff. Medicines intended for self-use comprised 62.9% of purchases (1752/2785). First-time purchases (30.8%, 799/2594) were more commonly influenced by pharmacy staff than by advertising. Conclusions: This study used validated methods adapted to a changing marketplace, thus providing data that both confirm and add to knowledge surrounding medicine purchases. Despite the dynamics of the non-prescription market, it revealed consistencies with previous research.

Keywords
Drugs, Non-Prescription, Self Medication, Australia.