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Online Appendix 1. Example of an appropriate interaction

The following is one example of an interaction between a customer and a pharmacist. It is an illustration of how an effective and efficient conversation may occur between a pharmacist and a customer wishing to purchase an over-the-counter complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) for stress.

Scenario:

A female patient, aged in their twenties enters a pharmacy and asks to speak to the pharmacist. The pharmacist approaches the customer and the following conversation ensues.

Pharmacist: 'Good morning; you wanted to speak to a pharmacist?'

Customer: 'Yes. I've been feeling very stressed. Is there something natural you can suggest?'

Pharmacist: 'How long have you been feeling like this?'

Customer: 'About a month; maybe a little longer.'

Pharmacist: 'When you say you are stressed, what are your actual symptoms?'

Customer: 'Mainly I just feel overwhelmed. I feel like I can't cope. Sometimes I wake up at night and worry about things.'

Pharmacist: Do you have any idea why?

Customer: I'm a uni student and I have some big assignments due.

Pharmacist: How severe are the symptoms? Would you say the symptoms are severe?

Customer: No, no. I just want something to help before they get worse.

Pharmacist: Do you have any other medical conditions or take any medicines?

Customer: No, only the pill.

Pharmacist: So, you're not pregnant or breastfeeding?

Customer: No, definitely not.

Pharmacist: Can I ask you about your lifestyle, if you don't mind. Diet, alcohol, coffee, smoking, exercise: all those sort of things?

Customer: I don't smoke and only have an occasional drink at weekends. I make sure I have a healthy diet but I do have one coffee each morning. I do try to exercise most days, usually a walk.

Pharmacist: That's good. I think this product would be ideal for you. It has (name of herb) in it. It's a herb that helps keep your stress hormones at a correct level. It may take about a week before you feel much better. Take the dose on the packet, one tablet twice a day. There's no need to take them with food, but you can have them at breakfast and your night time meal. Some people feel better if they have the second one at lunch time instead. That's OK if you want to try it. You shouldn't notice any side effects, but, as with any new medicine, just be aware of anything different until you are used to them. They shouldn't make you tired, but you should find that your sleep will improve as well. I suggest about two to three months treatment. If they don't do the job or if you get worse, then you need to go to the doctor. Are you fine with all that?

Customer: Yes. That all sounds good.

Pharmacist: There are some good lifestyle recommendations that can assist as well. Here is some useful information. It's from a reputable website run by the state government. (Gives her a computer printout).

Pharmacist: If you have any questions later you can always come back and see me.

Customer: Thanks very much for your help.

Pharmacist: No worries. Good luck with your studies.

Customer: Thanks again.

The customer completes the transaction at the service counter and exits.