

## An evaluation of community pharmacists' responses to ethically challenging requests for emergency contraception

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### Objective

The aim of this study was to assess the management of ethical dilemmas involving over-the-counter requests for emergency contraception in community pharmacies.

### Methods

Mystery patient visitations were presented to 23 consenting community pharmacies in the Gold Coast region during December 2010. Trained actors attended participating pharmacies as mystery patients, and presented one of two ethically challenging scenarios involving a request for emergency contraception. Semi-covert data was collected throughout the mystery patient visits, utilising qualitative methods of observation, and open questioning. Immediately following each pharmacy interaction, the mystery patient relayed a verbal transcript to the research officer, to eliminate bias and premature analysis.

### Results

The data suggests that there are identifiable learning and training gaps amongst pharmacists and pharmacy staff with respect to professional and ethical obligations associated with complicated Schedule 3 (Pharmacist Only) medicines requests. Deficits were particularly noted in history taking, clinical assessment, comprehensive counselling, utilisation of professional resources and ethical reasoning skills.

### Conclusions

Targeted training is required across community pharmacy staff to enhance patient confidence in community pharmacy and its' provision of advanced services. However, the impact of time pressures and financial burdens on the quality of pharmaceutical services need to be acknowledged. Further studies could enable development of training tools to address practice shortcomings that were identified through this pilot research.