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Key stakeholders perceptions of pharmacist independent prescribing within community pharmacies in Wales: a qualitative study

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Abstract

Independent prescribing is defined as the responsibility for decision-making, including the prescribing of medications based on patient assessments for both diagnosed and undiagnosed conditions. The Independent Prescribing Service (IPS) in Wales enables qualified pharmacists to prescribe medications and manage patient care within community pharmacies, under a structured NHS contract. This study aimed to explore the perception of key stakeholders on IPS within community pharmacies across Wales. Participants were identified through purposive sampling. Semi-structured interviews, with consent, were conducted with key stakeholders, including representatives from the Welsh Government, Local Health Boards Community Pharmacy Leads, and active community pharmacist prescribers. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. The study was approved by the Cardiff School of Pharmacy Ethics Committee and the Research and Development (R&D) department from the relevant Health Boards (HBs) in Wales. Fourteen participants were interviewed, revealing key themes such as the benefits of IPS in improving patient access to care and reducing GP workloads. However, several barriers were identified, including inconsistencies in IPS practices, workforce limitations, and infrastructure challenges. Participants highlighted the need for future research, particularly patient satisfaction surveys, to explore views of IPS from a user perspective. The study concludes that the integration of the IPS within community pharmacies is widely supported by stakeholders, who recognise its role in improving patient care, enhancing pharmacy services, and elevating the professional status of pharmacists. Future research will include patient satisfaction surveys to further explore IPS and optimise service delivery based on user feedback.