



## Evaluation of the Prevalence and Consequences of Self Medication among Graduates of the Health Area

**Bruno Vilas Boas Dias<sup>1\*</sup>, Camila Cristina Prado<sup>2</sup>, Sílvia Maria Ribeiro Oyama<sup>3</sup> and Danila Soares Tambalo<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Professor of the Undergraduate Course in Nursing, Padre Anchieta University in Jundiá and Campo Limpo Paulista University, Brazil

<sup>2</sup>Academics Nursing at University, Center Campo Limpo Paulista, Brazil

<sup>3</sup>Pedagogical Coordinator of the Nursing course of the University, Center Campo Limpo Paulista and Paulínia and College of Paulínia, Professor of the Undergraduate Course in Nursing, Padre Anchieta University, Brazil

<sup>4</sup>Professor of the Undergraduate Course in Nursing, Campo Limpo Paulista University, Brazil

**\*Corresponding Author:** Bruno Vilas Boas Dias, Professor of the Undergraduate Course in Nursing, Padre Anchieta University in Jundiá and Campo Limpo Paulista University, Brazil.

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Self-medication can be defined as the habit of people to adopt an initiative to use non-prescription medicines.

**Objective:** To identify the prevalence, factors, complications and behaviors of self-medication among the undergraduate students of the last year of health and if the course influences self-medication.

**Method:** This is a quantitative, descriptive and cross-sectional study that was carried out with health students, who answered a questionnaire about self-medication.

**Results:** It was identified that 98.39% of the individuals studied self-medicated. The most commonly used medication was the analgesic, and the rapid relief of symptoms was the reason for self-medication. And that through the knowledge acquired in the course they feel more confident in self-medication.

**Conclusion:** Self-medication in this study is highly practiced, justifying the confidence acquired in the course to self-medicate.

**Keywords:** Self-Medication; Nursing Students; Use of Medications

### Introduction

In the world the prevalence of self-medication is high among the population, it is a growing phenomenon in every society, especially in Europe, where it is estimated that 30% of total drug consumption is related to self-medication [1].

Self-medication can be defined as the habit of people to adopt an initiative to use medications without a prescription, in order to alleviate symptoms or even to treat diseases [2].

In Brazil, about 80 million people self-medicate and among those who use self-medication studies report high rates among students in the health area, with nursing having a high incidence

with results between 72% and 91.2% when compared to other groups like the elderly. The results are worrying, since they are professionals in the health area and should serve as an example of self-care for their patients [3,4].

The practice of self-medication may be advised by the pharmacist when using non-prescription medicines. The consumption of drugs without prescription in Brazil is practiced by 80 million people and causes about 20 thousand deaths per year [5].

Among the drugs most commonly used are analgesics, antipyretics, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, antibiotics, nasal decongestants and antacids [1,5].

Some reasons why people self-medicate are: acute pain without improvement, accumulation of general knowledge, they are wasting time going to the hospital on the grounds of knowing which medication will be prescribed, poor care, queues with constant delays, or even leaving without a solution, access to drugs (especially those that can be released without a prescription) and influence of family, friends, pharmacists and acquaintances [1,5].

There are several factors in the economic, political and cultural field that cooperate to increase the self-medication, causing several damages to the health of users and resulting in adverse effects, pathological complications, complications of the disease and drug hypersensitivity, besides causing great costs with public health [4,5]. Headache, for example, is seen as a simple symptom, but may be masking signs of diseases such as: hypertension, migraines, brain tumors, aneurysms, and may even be an abuse of the practice of using the medication itself [6].

Health professionals such as nurses and pharmacists are responsible for guiding and raising patients' awareness of healthy health habits, and it is important to know in these areas whether the students in training are already self-medicating. There are concrete data on mortality due to the use of over-the-counter medication and, therefore, the study becomes relevant.

## Objectives

To identify among the graduating students of the nursing and pharmacy courses of a university in the interior of São Paulo: the prevalence of self-medication; the factors that lead academics to self-medicate. complications and behaviors in cases of unwanted reactions with self-medication and if the course attended influences self-medication.

## Method

It is a quantitative, descriptive and cross-sectional study that was carried out at a private college in the interior of the state of São Paulo, offering about 40 courses for approximately 6,000 students.

The sample is of convenience and non-probabilistic type and was composed by 62 undergraduate students in nursing and pharmacy, which are the only two undergraduate courses in the health area with students already in the final phase, ie, seventh and eighth semesters. This number of academics represents almost all the graduates of these courses.

Regarding the collection and procedures for data collection, the approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the Campo Limpo Paulista School, the prior authorization of the coordinations of the mentioned courses, scheduling with the coordinators and teachers of the respective courses for data collection.

In relation to the students included in the study, they were guided in relation to the objectives of the study, about the Term of Free Consent and Clarified and invited to participate. It was necessary to be properly enrolled in the seventh or eighth semester of the mentioned courses. The estimated time for data collection was 20 minutes. On the scheduled day, the data collection was performed with the students present in the room.

The instruments for data collection were developed by the researchers. Are two. The first one referring to sociodemographic characteristics with five questions related to gender, age, course attendance, current period and whether another course had already been completed is broad-based, undergraduate or technical. The second instrument has 12 questions regarding self-medication on its own initiative, indication and advice for self-medication, use of old prescription drug, group of medication used, which signs and symptoms sought to resolve if self-medication, unwanted reactions and conduct related to self-medication, justification and recidivism for consumption of medication without prescription and lastly, if the undergraduate course had influence in self-medication.

## Results

Of the total of 62 participants, it was identified that the predominance of female students 46 (74.19%). Regarding the courses, the highest participation rate was 43 (69.35%) of the students in the nursing course, and 19 (30.64%) were in the pharmacy course. As for the semester, 42 (67.74%) of the students attended the 8th semester and 20 (32.25%) the seventh semester.

Of the 62 participants 61 (98.39%) of the participants confirmed the use of nonprescription medication. About frequency 49 (80.33%) stated use for many times. Among the 61 graduates who reported self-medication, the most commonly used drugs were analgesics with 56 (91.80%), anti-influenza 42 (68.85%), antibiotics 27 (44.26%), and nine psychotropic (14.75%).

The reasons that have led the participants to consume non-prescription medications are headache 44 (72.13%), cold, flu and cough 38 (62.30%), fever 32 (52.46%), colic 26 (42.62) (16.67%) for stress, one (16.67%) for renitus, and one for one (16.67%) for the stomach and one (17.67%) for chronic pain. In cases of unwanted reactions caused by self-medication 9 (45%) self-medicalized again, 3 (15%) sought the basic health unit in an attempt to solve the problem.

As a justification for self-medication, 12 (19.67%) claimed that access to health services was difficult, 36 (59.02%) of the participants were quick to relieve symptoms and 25 (40.98%) were self-medication. justifies having the necessary knowledge to do so. When asked if they self-medicate again, 52 (85.24%) of the participants answered affirmatively.

The undergraduate course provides safety for 52 (85.24%) of the participants if they self-medicate and have been influencing the use of self-medication for 33 (54.09%) participants.

## Discussion

Self-medication is a recurring action with great health risks to the population. And the present study sought to evaluate some aspects related to the students of courses in the health area. The fact that most participants are female can be explained by the courses chosen for the research: Nursing and Pharmacy. Both are courses where there is a greater prevalence of women [7].

In a study carried out at the University of Alfenas-MG in 2007, the prevalence of self-medication among nursing students (nursing and pharmacy) was higher than 86% [8]. In 2014, a study conducted in the city of Jequié in Bahia found that (98.01%) of the participants in nursing, pharmacy, medicine and dentistry courses also stated that they had already used medications without guidance or medical prescription evidencing a high permanence of this practice [5]. Similar results were found in our study when 61 (98.38%) of the participants stated self-medication.

The reasons why students self-medicate are related to knowledge of the drugs and symptoms of the diseases, and believe that to solve the health problem they face is not necessary to seek medical help. Other factors such as previous experience and unavailability of seeking the health service are also listed [5].

Half of the graduates 31 (50%) said they use old recipes for the practice of self-medication. The data were similar to the study

with 362 academics from the School of Marília in 2012 when about 128 (35.6%) stated that they reused their income. The participants claimed to keep the prescription of the medicine that solved their health problems and eventually, in the future, to use again if they think that the health problem reappears [9].

In relation to unwanted reactions with self-medication, the study conducted in Juiz de Fora in 2006 found that only 6% of the students interviewed had any type of complication after self-medication. It was verified in our study that 20 (33.88%) participants had unexpected reactions with self-medication. One of the hypotheses that may justify these results is the lack of perceived health impairment, making it difficult to understand what it was presenting before the medication with what it started after self-medication [6].

Graduates who had an adverse reaction opted to look for several alternatives to solve the problem, but the Basic Health Unit that is not mentioned as a resource for health care.

The objective of the Basic Health Unit is the monitoring of individual and collective needs related to primary care, not being an adequate health service for first care, which in many cases involve the need for patient observation and immediate onset of treatment [10].

The reasons for not seeking the Basic Health Unit as the first resource to solve the acute health problem due to self-medication are varied and the criticisms due to the characteristics of the units' functioning, the need for scheduling for medical consultations, availability limited medical care, lack of testing equipment, among others [10].

In a private university in the State of São Paulo, it was verified that health students have greater confidence in the practice of self-medication, due to the previous knowledge acquired in the course [7]. In the present study results also demonstrated a predominance in this sense with the affirmation of 52 (85.24%) students.

And more than half 33 (54.09%) report that self-medication is based on the knowledge obtained in the current graduation.

Thus, it is noted that the knowledge about the health problem and medicine has significantly influenced the university students in the area of health and that through the course acquire a greater sense of personal autonomy in the face of decisions about health itself.

These data are important because they can lead to rational drug use strategies depending on the population to be employed. It is necessary to remember the need for the awareness of the graduates of the health area to reduce the practice of self-medication. This practice may also be correlated with the stressful journey in the last year of graduation, having as a risk factor for their illness few hours of sleep, stress and worry, thus causing the practice of self-medication [12,13].

How much to advise with third parties as relatives, pharmacists, classmates or neighbors about self-medication 52 (85.24%) of the students affirmed this practice. Relatives were the most wanted as a source of information 21 (42.31%). The numbers were similar to studies with academics from the health area of the State University of Londrina in 2015 (86.05%) [14].

There is a confidence in the indication of third parties and in the resolution of the symptoms to the use of medicines already used by others. Not without mentioning the reuse of leftover medicines from previous prescriptions that end up influencing the practice of counseling [15].

When asked if they would self-medicate again the study showed that 52 (85.24%) reported that if they considered it necessary, yes. The justification for the act is mainly due to the rapid relief of symptoms 36 (59.01%) followed by 25 (40.98%) of participants who consider themselves capable due to the knowledge they have to self-medicate.

A similar result can be seen in the Lisbon study, which in 2013 showed that 72% of the interviewees used self-medication to avoid waiting times during a medical visit and to consider them to be a health problem for passengers [1].

## Conclusion

The self-medication observed in this study is a practice influenced by 98.39% of undergraduates and by different factors, such as socioeconomic, knowledge of medications, rapid relief of symptoms and academic progression throughout the course.

As for the choice of drugs, it is usually done through previous prescriptions and/or third-party counseling mostly by relatives and having the most commonly used pain reliever for pain relief. In most cases the low rate of adverse reaction may contribute to a high rate of self-medication.

The accumulation of knowledge, including graduation here, makes the student more confident and confident to self-medicate.

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