

Title: To sell or not to sell – emergency contraception sales and the window of efficacy.

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Abstract:

BackgroundPharmacists are medicines experts, viewed as trustworthy by patients. Australian pharmacists do not charge consultation fees, but recoup this expense in product sales. A product can be recommended to generate profit when health advice is sought, but may not concord with national professional guidelines. MethodsEight female students were recruited to ‘mystery shop’ randomly identified pharmacies with one of two scenarios for emergency contraception – within 24 hours (A) and over 72 hours (B) after unprotected intercourse. Only levonorgestrel was available OTC in Australia at the time.ResultsEach scenario was enacted in 45 pharmacies. The majority of interactions involved a pharmacist (33 A/34 B) with the same average time per interaction (4.6 mins A/4.5 mins B). All scenario A were provided levonorgestrel. Only 9 pharmacies in scenario B did not provide levonorgestrel (1 did not refer to the doctor). Of the 36 levonorgestrel sales in scenario B, 15 were not referred for follow up, 11 had no discussion about treatment options and 7 received no advice on treatments; all contravening PSA guidelines.ConclusionThe data indicate Australian pharmacists may recommend a product when guidelines show a low chance of success. This could be to recoup consulting expenses via a sale. Further research is needed to ascertain if other products are used outside guidelines to recoup consultation expenses.