

Category Focus on Eyes and Ears

Eye and ear care may be considered as smaller categories within the scope of pharmacy care; however, eye and ear problems can be unpleasant, and this therefore represents an opportunity where pharmacists can make a big difference when treated properly.



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In order to maximise on sales, pharmacies should be looking at marketing hay fever medications from mid-March, as the end of March to early September tend to be the months with the highest pollen count.

Having staff put out displays for hay fever medication early, allows them ample opportunity to go through patient information leaflets, guidelines and ask the pharmacist if they have any questions about the products. It also means that you will have customers prepared early and can give them advice on methods of preventing hay fever and the importance of prophylactic use if they tend to have very severe symptoms. It is worth noting the different options available within this category.

There are eye drops containing antihistamines to help prevent the allergic reaction, blocking histamines in the body and quickly reducing symptoms like itchy, watery eyes. Examples of antihistamine eye drops include Opticrom and Otrivine.

Other eye-drops on the market can help alleviate the symptoms associated with hay fever including eye drops for itchy, watery eyes, however, these do not contain antihistamines. If patients tend to have overly sensitive eyes, pharmacy staff should suggest the single dose eye drops (Opticrom Allergy, Optase Allergy Drops, Fusion Allergy eye drops) as these products do not contain any preservatives which can cause irritation in patients with sensitive eyes.

Age-Related Macular Degeneration

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is one of the leading causes of visual impairment in older adults. It causes gradual loss of sight and blurred vision. A lot of the time, patients get a diagnosis for this condition when the damage is already done. There are certain factors which make patients more susceptible to getting this condition, including smoking, high blood pressure, obesity or a

Building Loyalty

In the last year, with the Covid-19 outbreak, I have found that customers are relying more and more on the pharmacy when it comes to minor ailments as it was almost impossible to get a doctor's appointment. As a result of this, patients will have gained a lot of trust in the pharmacy profession and should in future know to turn to their local pharmacist for advice before going to the doctor.

Pharmacists and pharmacy staff need to keep on top of training in these areas so they can be confident in their ability to recommend certain products and know when to refer on to a GP. This is essential for building up a good rapport with patients, ensuring they will return for your advice in future.

It is important that staff have the confidence to ask appropriate questions to establish the level of discomfort a patient is feeling, how long this issue has been occurring, other medications etc. This will help the staff to know whether they can recommend a product for this issue or whether they need to refer this customer to the pharmacist or the GP to ensure they get appropriate treatment. Any educational information available from the product manufacturers should be taken advantage of.

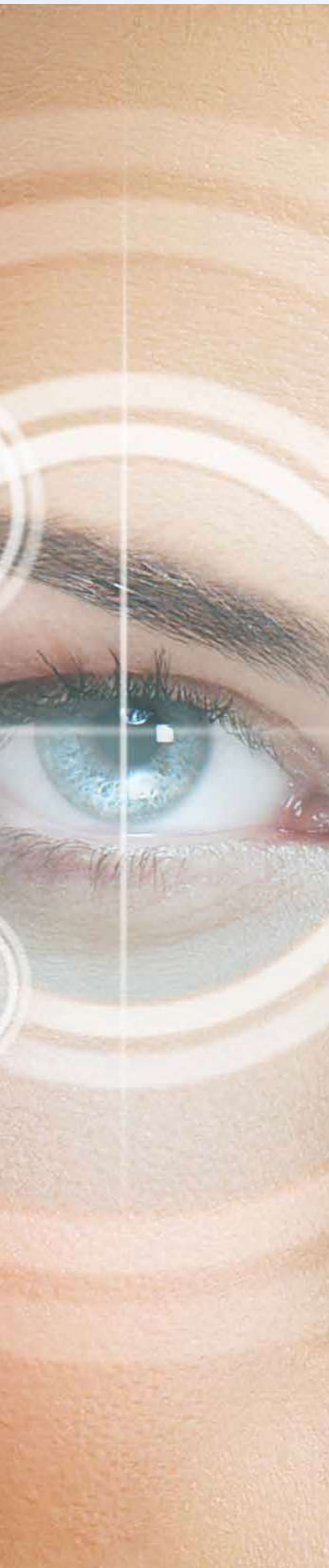
While these companies offer training in order to promote their own products, they should be taken with an open mind and staff can use the knowledge they will gain across a range of different products.

These training opportunities help staff to build confidence to be able to offer the best help to patients who will recognise and appreciate the staff knowledge. The company may also provide leaflets or samples, which can help the pharmacy to provide a more knowledgeable and professional service. These training sessions can generally be requested through the sales representative of the company in your area, via phone call or email.

Effective Merchandising

Eye and Ear care categories should be merchandised appropriately and should be displayed in a way to help boost sales. Eye care should have a place out on the shop floor as well as behind the counter. This enables patients to have a browse allowing for self-selection and consideration while also having the ability to ask for products at the counter when they have brought their other items to the till. Pharmacies should dual site eyecare with allergy treatments as there is some crossover with dry eyes, itchy, watering eyes etc.





diet high in unsaturated fat and lack of exercise.

Supplements containing all three macula carotenoids Lutein, Zeaxanthin and meso-zeaxanthin like MacuShield, MacuShield Gold, MacuSave MacuPrime and MacuPrime PLUS help to reduce the risk and/or slow the progression of AMD. Lutein Omega-3, MacuPrime PLUS also contain zinc to help maintain normal vision, copper, vitamin C and vitamin E, which contributes to the protection of cells from oxidative stress. MacuPrime and MacuSave are gluten free so they are safe for coeliac customers. Most of these supplements are a once daily tablet which tends to be well tolerated by customers.

Pharmacy staff should be well versed in the benefits of these treatments as they should be confident in discussing the benefits of these supplements with patients whom they recognise to be in an 'at risk' category.

Pharmacies can also take advantage of the cosmetic side of eyecare, including anti-redness eye drops, eye creams and eye brighteners. Dry skin around eyes can often lead to discomfort for patients and pharmacy staff should be well versed on which eye ointments and moisturisers are safe to be used on and near the eyes. In recent years, there has been an increased demand for cosmetic procedures involving the eyes, including lash lifts and tints, semi-permanent eyelash extensions and eyebrow tints.

As a result of this, more people are suffering with allergic reactions or skin irritation to some of the products being used. Products like Xailin Eye Gel or Hylo-Night can be recommended in these instances as they contain white soft paraffin (Hylo-night also contains liquid paraffin) which will hydrate the skin on the eyelid, locking in moisture, helping to heal the irritation and discomfort for the patient.

Hylo-Night also contains retinol palmitate (vitamin A) which helps improve skin tone and prevent collagen breakdown. These products are licensed for use in the eye and so offer a safe option to treat dry/ irritated skin on the eyelid as it doesn't matter if the patient were to accidentally get it in their eye. Pharmacy staff should proactively offer this advice if a customer is discussing getting these treatments done soon.

Pharmacists should also actively offer ear and eye health promotion services. This can include suggesting products for uses which may not come to mind straight away, for example, Blephaclean wipes can be used to remove make-up while also gently cleansing the eyelids and lashes. These wipes are free from parabens, perfumes and preservatives and so are a fantastic alternative to eye-make up removal for patients with extremely sensitive eyes.

This will also help prevent eye infections and blepharitis in patients who may be prone to these conditions. For ear health, using products like 'Audispray' to clean ear wax, rather than the traditional but unsafe way of using cotton buds. These are common areas where staff would get asked questions on a regular basis so having staff well versed in these areas with helpful hints and tips for patients is essential.

This will add value to pharmacy services and should encourage loyalty among customers. It is important to educate patients on the need for proper eye and ear care and the importance of not ignoring problems as these could be signs of a more serious condition. Eyesight and hearing are so precious and so it is vital that we would treat these with care and do everything possible to maintain their health.

Product Innovation

Continuing product innovation within eye care is providing customers with new options. The latest option in this category is the increasing availability of eye mists/sprays. This allows for absorption of active ingredients through the eyelids and removes the need for the accuracy of instilling drops. There are currently eye mists/sprays available for dry and tired eyes, itchy and watery eyes.

A lot of patients tend to mention not liking instilling eye drops and so this overcomes that issue as the patient can close their eyes and self-administer. This is also a helpful method to administer eye drops for a patient who has any motor impairment caused by Parkinson's, Multiple Sclerosis, Motor neuron Disease etc.

These patients can maintain their independence by administering a spray as it is easier to use and requires less dexterity and

accuracy than drops. In patients with extremely poor motor function, it may also be easier for a carer or family member to administer the spray to the patient rather than the drops. These are things which pharmacies are in a unique position to be able to give advice on as they can see the patient's medication history when they are purchasing items in store.

Ear care is often overlooked as a section in pharmacy, however, with the availability of ear wax treatments over the counter, it prevents customers from having to wait on doctors' appointments to solve such an easily fixed issue.

This also allows for patients to rule out the cause of the problem being a small ear wax build up, which is helpful for the doctors as they can look at other potential causes and treatments which are more appropriate.

Patients will often present to the pharmacy looking for treatment to relieve the symptoms of pain, swelling and itchiness in the ear. This is often called 'Otitis Externa' or swimmer's ear. There are drops available to help ease this, including CI-ear which work by coating the outer ear canal with a protective film which helps to soothe irritation and swollen tissue resulting from burning, itching, swelling and pain.

They work to reduce swelling in the ear and alleviate pain. Children will also often present with what is known as glue ear, this is a condition where the empty middle part of the ear canal fills up with fluid. This can cause pain in the ear, temporary hearing loss or a ringing in the ear (tinnitus). This condition normally clears up on its own and it is important to reassure parents of this, but they can use the Otovent nasal device to reduce symptoms.

Pharmacy staff should provide all customers with advice pertaining to what to look out for in cases of infections and if such symptoms should appear, that they would stop self-treating and go to see their doctor.

Both categories can provide an excellent service to patients when merchandised properly and when staff are trained to know the different products and feel confident to sell the products and offer advice to customers.