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## Over-The-Counter Medication Use and Misuse: Trends, Challenges, and the Role of Pharmacists

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### ABSTRACT

Over-the-counter (OTC) medications play a crucial role in primary healthcare by providing accessible and cost-effective treatment for minor ailments such as fever, cold, headache, allergies, and digestive issues. In India, the widespread availability of OTC drugs has grown significantly, supported by increasing consumer demand, digital penetration, and the expansion of e-pharmacies. However, this rise has also been accompanied by a concerning trend of misuse and irrational consumption, including inappropriate self-medication, overuse of antibiotics, and drug interactions, often without professional consultation. Key drivers of this misuse include limited access to healthcare professionals, economic constraints, cultural reliance on self-care, and aggressive marketing by pharmaceutical companies.

This review examines the current trends in OTC medication use across India, shedding light on consumer behavior, market dynamics, and regulatory gaps. It also emphasizes the critical public health risks associated with OTC misuse, such as antimicrobial resistance and adverse drug reactions. Importantly, the article underscores the pivotal role pharmacists can play as accessible healthcare providers in promoting rational drug use. Through proper counseling, patient education, and regulation enforcement, pharmacists can act as gatekeepers in curbing misuse and ensuring safe self-medication practices. Strengthening the regulatory framework, enhancing digital surveillance, and empowering pharmacists are recommended strategies to balance accessibility with safety in the growing OTC drug landscape.

**KEYWORDS:** Over-the-counter medications, Self-medication, Pharmacist role, Drug misuse, Antimicrobial resistance

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