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ABSTRACT

Self-medication by Using Online and Other Methods in Palestine.

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Background: Advertisements of medical products on social media networks has become increasingly common. This is also associated with online shopping in order to self-medicate. Such practice highlights the influence of social media and advertising on individuals to use medicinal products without instructions of physicians.

Objectives: To assess the probable reasons, the extent of use, sources of advice and consequences of online self-medicate practice among University students in Palestine.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out using a "pretested questionnaire," which was prepared in the Arabic language, among 700 students involved in face-to-face interviews, from three public universities in Palestine (Al-Najah, Al-Quds and Bethlehem university). The study was conducted over three months (Nov2019—Jan2020), including all years universities students of both medical and nonmedical faculties. Data were collected, coded, entered, analyzed and summarized by statistical package for social sciences program (SPSS) version 22. Descriptive results were expressed as frequency, percentage, and mean \pm SD.

Results: (94.2%) students reported that they keep seeing medical ads while scrolling their social network accounts. Younger age (20-29 years), female (87.6%), medical students (57.4%) tended to use online self-medication practice more than their peers did. In addition, (52.7%) of the respondents reported that they use the internet for more than six hours per day, (65.7%) reported



that they use online products without consulting a physician or a pharmacist. The most commonly used products among the surveyed students were skincare products (76.7%), followed by hair products (72.2%), and vitamins (58.8%). The most frequently reported dosage form was cream and ointments (71.3%). Moreover, (54.7%) students reported not using the product again after their first trial. The Principle reasons for seeking online self-medication were, “I don’t have time to visit doctors (50.4%)”, and “to save money” (49.8%). The most-reported sources for self-medication were the internet (45.3%), and (16.7%) reported using the product according to the great propaganda campaign by the social networks. The majority (64.1%) reported that their experience was “bad” and “not healthy”. (50.8%) students reported having experienced side effects, in addition to this, 33.6% is the proportion of the students who stopped using the product because of side effects and so they gave it to one of their family members or friends. (29.6%) did not have any instructions for use and (35.3%) reported trusting what the seller said about the product, and (65.3%) reported searching on the internet before using it.

Conclusions: Online self-medication is a commonly used practice by young Palestinian University students; this constitutes a health problem that needs intervention to minimize risk. We emphasize the important role of a pharmacist in educating the community especially the youth category (20-29 years) regarding online medication practices that may have harmful side effects.

Key words: Online self-medication, university students, awareness, Palestine.