**Practical problems with medication use experienced by older people: a qualitative study**

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**Objective**

Physical limitations, such as impaired vision, poor handgrip strength, loss of fine motor skills, or dysphagia, and cognitive decline increase with advancing age. Because of physical limitations, older people experience practical problems when using their medicines. This study aimed to identify the practical problems that older people experience when taking their medicines and how they manage these problems, and to determine the potential clinical relevance thereof.

**Methods**

A qualitative study with semi-structured face-to-face interviews, investigating 59 community-dwelling people aged 70 years or older who used at least three different oral prescription medicines daily and managed their medication independently, which were recruited from a community pharmacy and a geriatric outpatient ward in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

**Results**

A total of 211 practical problems and 184 strategies to manage these problems were identified. Fifty-six (95%) participants experienced one or more practical problem, ranging from problems with reading and understanding the instructions for use, handling the outer packaging, handling the immediate packaging, completing any preparation prior to use, and taking the medicine. In ten participants at least one of their problems, in combination with the strategy to resolve the problem, was considered to have potential clinical consequences, and eleven (5%) problems were considered to potentially cause moderate or severe clinical deterioration. For example, administering pieces and crumbles of tablets after unsuccessful breaking of enalapril, glibenclamide, furosemide, and phenprocoumon; swallowing ferrous fumarate with yoghurt; and taking wrong dosages of levodopa/benserazide look-alike dosage forms.

**Conclusions**

Older people experience a number of problems using their medicines and these problems can lead to incorrect medication use, with potentially clinically relevant consequences. This study provides a classification of the practical problems experienced by older people. The findings challenge healthcare professionals, drug developers and regulators to find ways to diminish the practical problems experienced by older people.