PERCEIVED BARRIERS AND EXPECTATIONS OF GENERAL PUBLIC FOR ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY PHARMACY IN PAKISTAN

Wajiha Iffat1*, Sadia Shakeel1, Shehla Imam2, Tehseen Quds1

1Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi, Pakistan.
2Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Karachi, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

Objectives: The current study was conducted with the aim to assess the public’s attitudes towards the community pharmacist’s role in Pakistan, to investigate the public’s use of community pharmacy, and to determine the public’s views of and expectations with community pharmacy services. Materials and Methods: This transversal study was conducted from June to Aug 2015 by adopting a pre validated questionnaire distributed to people of all ages who were willing to participate in the study. Overall, three hundred and seventeen individuals participated in the study. Descriptive statistics were used to demonstrate participants’ demographic information and their response to the questionnaire items. One way ANOVA test was executed to evaluate the association of gender, age, education, social status and occupation of participants with their response. A p value < 0.05 was considered as significant. Results: Around 70% opined that pharmacists are health professionals who know a lot about drugs but are concerned about, and committed to, caring for the public. Majority of the participants (31%) visited pharmacy to obtain prescription medications and 26% to obtain OTCs. Lack of awareness of consumers about the ability of the pharmacist to answer drug- and disease-related questions (89.39%) and awareness about the role of pharmacist (77.27%) were perceived to be the main barrier for establishment of community pharmacy. Major expectations about community pharmacist’s role included counseling about the potential interactions with other medicines (92.54%), counseling about the directions for use of medications (91.18%) and counseling about diseases (89.16%). Conclusion: It is concluded that participants showed positive attitude towards the community pharmacy practice and highlighted the need of community
pharmacist in healthcare system of Pakistan. Government and non government organizations should come forward to work seriously to boost up the community pharmacy practice. It is a step toward improved pharmaceutical care practices in Pakistan and will ultimately improve the health status of our community in near future.

KEYWORDS: Community pharmacists; expectation; barriers; Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION
During the earlier decades, the pharmacy profession has made significant efforts to move its focus from drug supply to patient care. The need of community pharmacist has been identified by World Health Organization (WHO) in developing countries where general public cannot meet the high expense of physicians. The role of the pharmacist has been revolutionized with the passage of time and has been acknowledged in the health care sector globally. WHO played a great role towards encouraging and defending the role of pharmacist’s worldwide. Pharmacists’s aim is to accomplish healthier outcomes from medication; hence they are trying to move away from a drug focused to a patient oriented approach. Community pharmacists remain in direct access to the community, where they are liable to perform numerous tasks such as prescription processing, extemporaneous compounding, dispensing of prescription, monitoring of drug utilization, patient counseling, patient education, drug referral and for other pertinent information required by the patients. Community pharmacists may also be asked by physicians, surgeons, dentists for giving expert advice on selection of rational medicines for patients.

Pharmacists who implement the pharmaceutical care approach can considerably contribute to the outcome of drug therapy and improve patient quality of life by tailoring their drug-related needs. Community pharmacists are in a distinguishing position to identify, prevent, and resolve drug-related problems in ambulatory patients, and data suggests that community-based pharmacy services can improve health outcomes. The pharmaceutical care framework assumes a patient–pharmacist professional relationship that is based upon caring, trust, communication, cooperation, and mutual decision making in which the pharmacist works very closely with the patient to promote health, to prevent disease, and to insure that drug therapy is safe and effective. Because of this close relationship, the successful implementation of the pharmaceutical care framework in community pharmacies requires that patients appropriately understand the pharmacist’s professional role especially with respect to
consultation with patients, monitoring the appropriateness of drug regimens, and other pharmaceutical care activities.

In developing countries like Pakistan not much research focusing on the role and responsibilities of community pharmacists have been conducted. A key factor in advancing pharmacy practice in community pharmacies in Pakistan is the understanding of public needs and expectations and barrier preventing the establishment of community pharmacy. Knowledge about public utilization of, and views about, community pharmacy services can assist pharmacists in meeting customers’ needs, in enhancing the quality of their services and improving customer satisfaction. Greater customer satisfaction, in turn, can be translated into greater loyalty to particular pharmacies and can facilitate the provision of pharmaceutical care through better customer–pharmacist communication.[1] Therefore the current study was conducted with the aim to assess the public’s attitudes towards the community pharmacist’s role in Pakistan, to investigate the public’s use of community pharmacy, and to determine the public’s views of and expectations with community pharmacy services.

METHODOLOGY
This transversal study was conducted from June to Aug 2015 by adopting a pre validated questionnaire distributed to people of all ages who were willing to participate in the study. Overall, three hundred and seventeen individuals participated in the study. The basic tool selected to conduct the study was questionnaire which was developed through the review of literature and researches available in this area. The participants were encouraged to fill up the given questionnaire on spot. After completion the questionnaires were subsequently collected for further analysis by using SPSS 20.0. Descriptive statistics were used to demonstrate participants’ demographic information and their response to the questionnaire items. One way ANOVA test was executed to evaluate the association of gender, age, education, social status and occupation of participants with their response. A p value < 0.05 was considered as significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
In current study, out of 400 survey questionnaires, only 317 were returned back in useable form. Hence the response rate was 79.25%. Table 1 showed the demographic of the study population. The study population comprised of 19% males and 81% females. 79% participants belonged to the age group of 15-25. 41.41% were undergraduates and 39.39% were graduates. The impression gained from the results of this questionnaire was that general
public have a positive attitude towards community pharmacists. 64.29% opined that pharmacists have a good balance between health and business matters. Around 70% opined that pharmacists are health professionals who know a lot about drugs but are concerned about, and committed to, caring for the public.

Table 1: Characteristics of study population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (Years)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-25</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45+</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>1.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matric</td>
<td>6.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>12.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>41.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>39.39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Common reasons for visiting community pharmacy

Millions of people visit community pharmacies every day for their health care needs all over the world. The major reasons of visiting community pharmacy by the public are illustrated in Fig. 1. Majority of the participants (31%) visited pharmacy to obtain prescription medications and 26% to obtain OTCs. Fig. 2 depicts the factors considered by the general public for selecting the particular pharmacy. Good range of products and services (17%) and good and
competitive prices (16%) were the main factors influencing the choice of any particular pharmacy.

![Factors influencing the choice of any particular pharmacy](image)

**Figure 2: Factors influencing the choice of any community pharmacy**

![Perceived barriers for establishment of community pharmacy](image)

**Figure 3: Perceived barriers of general public for establishment of community pharmacy**

It is recognized that most people are hesitant to move out of their comfort zone, particularly when they lack confidence in their knowledge and skills, and have concerns about new roles being mandated or being a legitimate priority for community pharmacies. The community pharmacy environment itself may not be conducive to new services. There is little published work regarding general public’s perceptions of the roles of a community pharmacist or of the
potential barriers to pharmacists increasing their involvement in medicines management.\cite{Iffat et al.} A focus group study of community pharmacists’ perceptions of their roles indicated that they wished to be an integral part of the patient’s health care, be active in health screening and minor illness, and move away from performing technical duties; however, there was not unanimous agreement on all roles.\cite{Iffat et al.} In our study, lack of awareness of consumers about the ability of the pharmacist to answer drug- and disease-related questions (89.39\%) , awareness about the role of pharmacist (77.27\%) and doctors are more trusted than pharmacists by public (73.85\%) were perceived to be the main barrier for establishment of community pharmacy.\cite{Iffat et al.} A possible explanation for this finding is that general public mostly believe that pharmacists do not have sufficient medical training to be able to correctly interpret a diagnosis or to participate in the clinical decision process.\cite{Iffat et al.} Other study also revealed that there was also a perception that the public and other health professionals lacked awareness of the role of the community pharmacist.\cite{Iffat et al.} Major expectations about community pharmacist’s role included counseling about the potential interactions with other medicines (92.54\%), counseling about the directions for use of medications (91.18\%) and counseling about diseases (89.16\%). Other expectations include pharmacist should have a complete knowledge regarding drugs (80.13\%), monitor safe and effective use of medications(75.93\%) and drug related problems should be discussed by a pharmacist(64.85\%). (Fig. 4) The provision of proactive, patient-specific advice before prescribing was an agreed role for community pharmacists in most other.\cite{Iffat et al., Iffat et al.}
Participants’ expectations about the services most likely to be provided by community pharmacy

Participants’ expectations about the services most likely to be provided by community pharmacy include provision of drug information (19%), maintenance of patients’ medical records (15%) and advice of minor illness (14%). (Fig. 5) One way ANOVA test was executed to evaluate the association of gender, age, education, social status and occupation of participants with their response. A p value < 0.05 was considered as significant. There was a significant association between education, social status and occupation of participants. However no signification relation exists between age and gender on the responses of the participants. The present study also invited the suggestion for the improvement of scope of community pharmacist in Pakistan. General response of the participants was that Government of Pakistan should take appropriate steps to ensure the availability of community pharmacist in practice and should pay them the financial reward that justifies their professional status as followed in other countries of the world.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that participants showed positive attitude towards the community pharmacy practice and highlighted the need of community pharmacist in healthcare system of Pakistan. As the pharmacists have a significant impact on public health and improving patient’s quality of life, the current practice of community pharmacists needs further improvement. Government and non government organizations should come forward to work seriously to boost up the community pharmacy practice. It is a step toward improved pharmaceutical care practices in Pakistan and will ultimately improve the health status of our community in near future.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT
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CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None.

REFERENCES