

# Publics' Perceptions of Community Pharmacists role in Patient Care Services

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines public perceptions of community pharmacists and their evolving role in patient care services, highlighting the transition from traditional medication dispensing to a more patient-centric model. Despite significant advancements in pharmaceutical care, public awareness of the diverse services offered by community pharmacists remains limited, often leading to underutilization of these vital healthcare resources. The study emphasizes the importance of trust in the patient-pharmacist relationship, which significantly influences patient satisfaction and engagement. It identifies barriers to effective service delivery, including inadequate reimbursement structures, lack of appropriate facilities, and insufficient technology. Recommendations for improving community pharmacists' impact on patient care include enhancing education and training, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and leveraging technology to streamline services. By addressing these challenges and promoting the full scope of pharmacists' capabilities, the study advocates for a more integrated approach to healthcare that positions community pharmacists as essential members of the healthcare team, ultimately aiming to improve patient outcomes and public health.

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, pharmacists have made great efforts to shift their focus from medication dispensing to patient care. The field has been undergoing a paradigm shift in this respect, from product-oriented functions, i.e., dispensing and compounding medications, to the provision of pharmaceutical services, information, and pharmaceutical care [1].

Pharmaceutical care contributes to reducing drug-related morbidities and mortalities, improving clinical outcomes and health-related quality of life, and lowering medical costs [2]. The cornerstone of pharmaceutical care success is the quality of patient-pharmacist relationships. In such relationships, patients grant authority to pharmacists to manage their health and well-being. In turn, pharmacists accept responsibility to take care of the well-being of the patients [3]. Community pharmacies are the front doors of medical advice and the points of sale of pharmaceutical products. Customer loyalty is crucial in the medical and pharmacy business [4].

Problems in pharmacist consultation can occur when patients and pharmacists have different expectations regarding the pharmacist's role and the provision of services.

Patients who have low expectations regarding a consultation with a pharmacist receive fewer consultations than those with higher expectations [5]. Therefore, the patient–pharmacist relationship is largely influenced by the level of the patient’s trust in the pharmacist [6]. Trust in pharmacists could be defined as “patients’ willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of pharmacists based on the expectation that pharmacists will do what is best for patients, irrespective of patients’ ability to monitor pharmacists” [7].

Patient satisfaction is an important indicator of the quality of health care services, and an important predictor of the relationship with the health care provider and of adhering to a medication regimen [8]. However, it is difficult to identify a single factor that is directly associated with a low or high level of patient satisfaction with the provided health care services. Saudi patients showed increased satisfaction, perception, and appreciation of the role of pharmacists in health care, as about 38% of respondents assured *suo moto* counseling by the pharmacist, 35% reported that pharmacists play an active role in their compliance to treatments, 43% acknowledged the role of pharmacists in solving medication related problems, 34% considered pharmacists as health awareness providers and 44.6% felt that pharmacists are indispensable and an effective part of the health care system [9].

#### Objectives:

The main objectives of this review are:

1. To explore community pharmacists' attitudes towards providing patient care services.
2. To identify the barriers and challenges faced by community pharmacists in delivering patient care services.
3. To assess the level of satisfaction and perceived impact of patient care services on community pharmacists.
4. To understand the training and resources needed for community pharmacists to effectively provide patient care services.

#### Public awareness regarding the community pharmacists’ services:

Public awareness regarding community pharmacists' services is a critical factor in maximizing the potential of these healthcare professionals in patient care. The role of community pharmacists has evolved significantly over the last few decades, transitioning from merely dispensing medications to providing a wide array of patient care services. However, despite these changes, public knowledge about the various services community pharmacists offer remains limited. Many individuals still perceive pharmacists primarily as medication dispensers, and they often overlook the extensive

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clinical support available within community pharmacies. This gap in understanding can lead to underutilization of valuable health services that could enhance patient outcomes, particularly in managing chronic diseases, medication management, and promoting public health initiatives [10].

Education plays a key role in enhancing public awareness concerning the services provided by community pharmacists. Efforts to promote understanding should involve targeted campaigns that convey the breadth of pharmacists' roles in healthcare. Informational materials, community workshops, and collaboration with other healthcare providers can support the dissemination of knowledge. Community pharmacists are often more accessible than physicians, making them a vital resource for health advice, medication counseling, and chronic disease management. By raising awareness of their capabilities, patients may be more likely to seek the guidance of pharmacists for self-care and medication optimization, leading to better health outcomes [11]. Online forums and social media channels can be utilized to share information on health topics, medication safety, immunization services, and disease prevention strategies. By being proactive in these spaces, pharmacists can demystify their role, address misconceptions, and provide real-time support to patients. This not only enhances public trust but also encourages individuals to view pharmacists as integral members of the healthcare team.

Additionally, collaboration with healthcare institutions, such as hospitals and clinics, can amplify efforts to improve public awareness. Joint initiatives that highlight the pharmacist's role in transitional care—where patients move from hospitalization to home care—can showcase the importance of medication reconciliation, adherence support, and education in preventing medication-related issues. Ultimately, such collaborative efforts can help position community pharmacists as frontline healthcare providers in managing patients' health and wellbeing [12]. Impact of community pharmacists on patient care services:

The role of pharmacists has been viewed in a multitude of ways, both clinically and to the public. American pharmacists are attempting to change the view of which the community believes that they are only there to provide medication. The on-going shift being mentioned is one from a “product-centric” model to a “patient-centric” model [13]. With increased training in areas such as the social determinants of health, providing care that extends beyond the spectrum of the clinic doors is a small portion of what community pharmacies are implementing into their workflow. Examples of these types of services are referrals to health and social services, patient education on medications and conditions, or care programs where patients can rely on staff care managers from the pharmacy [14]. Creating a safer environment for patients to seek clinical attention during important times, especially with regard to the complex medical world, could help change how patients view their visits to community

pharmacies. Community pharmacists are often the first point of contact for patients seeking medical advice or treatment for minor ailments. They are wellpositioned to provide valuable guidance on over-the-counter medications, prescription drugs, and general health-related queries. In addition to dispensing medications, community pharmacists also offer a range of clinical services such as medication therapy management, immunizations, health screenings, and chronic disease management. By working closely with patients, physicians, and other healthcare providers, community pharmacists help ensure that patients receive comprehensive and coordinated care. Moreover, community pharmacists play a key role in promoting medication adherence and safety by counseling patients on proper medication usage, potential side effects, and drug interactions. They also collaborate with healthcare teams to monitor patients' progress, adjust medication regimens as needed, and identify potential issues that may arise during the course of treatment [15]. Community pharmacists serve as advocates for patient health and well-being, working tirelessly to improve health outcomes and enhance the quality of life for individuals in their communities. Their role extends beyond the traditional pharmacy setting, as they actively engage with patients to educate them on disease prevention, healthy lifestyle choices, and self-care practices. Through their expertise and dedication, community pharmacists contribute significantly to the overall healthcare system by promoting optimal patient outcomes, reducing healthcare costs, and improving public health. In conclusion, the role of community pharmacists in patient care services is multifaceted and essential, as they serve as valuable resources for patients seeking personalized and comprehensive healthcare solutions. Their commitment to excellence, patient-centered care, and continuous professional development underscores their significance in the healthcare landscape. As integral members of the healthcare team, community pharmacists play a pivotal role in advancing patient care and promoting better health outcomes for individuals and communities alike [16]. Barriers and challenges:

The on-going shift to patient-centric and service-based models continues to be explored by American community pharmacies. There are still many barriers that could prevent this from being accomplished. The most prominent barrier would be community pharmacies not receiving reimbursement for PCS through third-party payers since they are not currently seen as providers per the Medicare Part B program. Currently, both private and public providers of insurance do not regularly pay for PCS [17].

Contracts for prescription payment are facilitated by healthcare intermediaries referred to as Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs). The main source of reimbursement for American community pharmacies involves two components: dispensing fee and prescription drug cost [18]. Almost all private and public (e.g., Medicare Part D) thirdparty payers through PBMs negotiate reimbursement rates with the community pharmacy. Community pharmacies lack leverage when looking to establish fair and equitable rates that cover both the drug costs and dispensing fee components of

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pharmacy reimbursement [19]. This peril has left individual community pharmacies little choice when accepting low rate contracts to maintain patients while not violating antitrust laws. The impact of PBMs lack of transparency and inadequate regulation is critical to the financial viability of future community pharmacies. The National Community Pharmacists Association has called for the modernization of pharmacy reimbursement to protect patient access to the state Medicaid programs [20]. A cost of dispensing report was commissioned showing pharmacies are currently inadequately reimbursed. The primary argument of the report outlined Federal Medicaid rules require state Medicaid fee-for-service programs to pay pharmacies dispensing fees that cover pharmacies' costs of dispensing prescription medications and providing related benefit and coverage services [21]. It was stated that dispensing fees are vital to account for community pharmacies' overhead costs to do business. It is important to note that dispensing fees are separate from care coordination activities that are considered PCS.

Other underlying barriers are that some pharmacies currently lack the proper layout to accommodate certain PCS, such as a separate and confidential room for patientspecific medical consultations. There is also the concern over the lack of proper resources and available technology to have productive services such as access to electronic health records and the ability to document these patient services [22].

Recommendations needed for community pharmacists to effectively provide patient care services:

Enhancing the integration of community pharmacists into interdisciplinary, collaborative teams focused on improving the health of populations and reducing health care costs offers an important opportunity for enhancing care value. To effectively deliver these services, community pharmacists must possess a diverse skill set and adhere to certain recommendations. Firstly, continuous education and training are essential for pharmacists to stay updated on the latest advancements in pharmaceutical care and treatment protocols. This includes attending workshops, seminars, and conferences to enhance their knowledge and skills. Additionally, pharmacists should cultivate strong communication skills to effectively interact with patients, understand their needs, and provide clear instructions on medication use and management [23].

Furthermore, building strong relationships with patients is key to ensuring successful patient care outcomes. Pharmacists should take the time to listen to patients' concerns, answer their questions, and offer personalized advice based on individual health needs. By establishing trust and rapport with patients, pharmacists can encourage medication adherence and promote better health outcomes [24]. Moreover, pharmacists should collaborate with other healthcare providers, such as physicians and nurses, to ensure

Publics' Perceptions of Community Pharmacists role in Patient Care Services comprehensive and coordinated care for patients. This interdisciplinary approach allows for the sharing of information and resources, leading to improved patient outcomes and satisfaction. In addition to clinical responsibilities, pharmacists must also prioritize patient safety and confidentiality. It is crucial for pharmacists to accurately dispense medications, conduct thorough medication reviews, and monitor for potential drug interactions or adverse effects [25]. By maintaining accurate patient records and upholding strict confidentiality standards, pharmacists can protect patient privacy and ensure the security of their health information. Pharmacists should also stay informed about regulatory guidelines and best practices in pharmacy management to uphold professional standards and compliance with legal requirements. Moreover, embracing technology and innovation is essential for modern pharmacists to enhance the quality and efficiency of patient care services. Implementing electronic health records, medication management systems, and telehealth platforms can streamline communication, improve medication adherence, and facilitate remote consultations with patients. Pharmacists should also leverage data analytics and evidence-based practice to make informed decisions and optimize patient outcomes. By embracing digital tools and technology, pharmacists can enhance their practice and deliver more personalized and effective care to patients [26].

## **2. Conclusion:**

In conclusion, this study highlights the evolving role of community pharmacists in patient care services and underscores the critical need for increased public awareness and education regarding their capabilities. As the healthcare landscape shifts towards more patient-centered models, community pharmacists are uniquely positioned to provide essential services that extend beyond traditional medication dispensing. However, significant barriers, including reimbursement challenges and inadequate resources, hinder their ability to fully realize this potential. To address these issues, it is imperative that pharmacists engage in continuous education, foster strong patient relationships, and collaborate with other healthcare providers to deliver comprehensive care. Additionally, embracing technology and advocating for policy changes that recognize pharmacists as healthcare providers will be crucial in enhancing their role in the healthcare system. By overcoming these challenges and effectively communicating their value, community pharmacists can significantly improve patient outcomes and contribute to a more efficient and accessible healthcare system. Ultimately, recognizing and supporting the multifaceted role of community pharmacists is essential for optimizing patient care and advancing public health initiatives.

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