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Review article

The role and scope of pharmacists in community settings: A review of developing countries

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ABSTRACT

A pharmacist is a person who is involved in designing, creating or manufacturing of a drug product, dispensing of a drug, managing and planning of a pharmaceutical care plan. They are experts on the action and uses of drugs, including their chemistry, pharmacology, the formulation of medicines. There are number of ways where pharmacist can serve the society. In a community pharmacy setting a pharmacist is tailored as the one who is knowledgeable enough to render such services. The role of pharmacist in community settings continues to be the objective of this article.

Keywords: Role, Scope, Pharmacist.

INTRODUCTION

A pharmacist is a person who is involved in designing, creating or manufacturing of a drug product, dispensing of a drug, managing and planning of a pharmaceutical care plan. They are experts on the action and uses of drugs, including their chemistry, pharmacology, the formulation of medicines. They are the health care professionals who have the responsibility to provide primary care to the patients and providing safe and effective use of medicines. Among doctors/physicians and nurses, pharmacists are also the part of the triangle of the health care system which has the primary role to satisfy the patient's need and to minimize their problems regarding any disease. There are number of ways where pharmacist can perform his/her role. He/She can join industry where he can be a production or quality control officer, may involve in regulatory affairs, or do sales and marketing of a new drug. In addition, he/she can involve in research and development program. In terms of clinical settings a pharmacist can work in a hospital as either a hospital pharmacist and can be

a clinical pharmacist where they can work directly with the general practitioners as part of the core team. The other domain is academia where a pharmacist can be involved in teaching and academic related activities. Finally, the domain of community pharmacy which, at the moment is booming in developing countries like India and Pakistan. (The Hindu, 2010 and Ayesha Javeed et al, 2012).

A community pharmacist, also coined as retail pharmacist, dispensing pharmacist, is a person who counsel, dispense, manage the patients care plan. As the community pharmacists are in direct contact with patient so they have number of responsibilities which can help to enhance the vision of their profession and their need in this health care system setting. If they have knowledge so they can build the confidence among patients and it would be a key source by which patients start to adhere to their therapy and start to trust them. He is also involve in reducing patient's cost and give a safe and effective therapy. Thus a community pharmacist plays an

important role in healthcare system. (Logan K, 1983)

In developing countries retail pharmacies are the important source of providing health advice (Hardon A, 1987). The reasons would be the quality of services provided (Logan K, 1983), cost effectiveness, accessibility (Hardon A et.al, 1987), variety of products available in an appropriate range of cost (Logan K, 1983).

Community pharmacist deals with the art of dispensing and prescribing drugs to the consumers. The role of community pharmacist in the society has been broadly classified in to three activities. The foremost responsibility of a community pharmacist is to counsel the patients on the prescribing of drugs. A community pharmacist takes the burden of both the patient as well as the physician in prescribing and dispensing drugs to the disabled and mentally ill patients too and therefore this requires the cooperation of the physicians as well. Secondly, some community pharmacists are also indulged in performing diagnostic services which includes urine test, lipid profile testing and pregnancy testing. Thirdly some pharmacists are involved in providing counseling services to the patients in their pharmacies as well and advise them on the usage of drugs. (Hardon A et.al, 1987 and Mills A et.al, 1983)

The community pharmacist renders such great professional services in the society without booking appointment and high consultation charges. Because of these highlighted services offered by the community pharmacist he is known to be highly appreciated by the patient and the physician. For this reason the role and the services offered by a community pharmacist is impossible to be neglected or denied in the modern society (BMJ, 1991).

Dispensing remains the core role of community pharmacist but the older meaning is to dispense medicines prepares it and gives it out to people has been reformed whilst the name remain the same. The focus of dispensing now rests not only on accurate supply of medication, but on checking that the medication is appropriate for the patient, and counseling the patient on its appropriate use. Community pharmacists should maintain patient's medication records which are record of their previous visit. Because majority of patients visit the same pharmacy as they do. Here is the duty of pharmacist to keep his patient's records so there would be an ease to investigate the past history of dispensing medication and the medication profile. They can also check the accuracy of new

prescription, compliance, and potential drug interactions. As repeating prescriptions increases so here is the responsibility of community pharmacist to identify and the unrecognized side effects, adverse effects, and drug interaction. As well as they can save the cost of the patients and improve their care. Modern technique is to have a computerized record system. The important thing, when a patient visits the pharmacy so pharmacist has to review his prescription. It helps him to know the presenting condition of the patient. He must ask the patients about his past medical history, any side effects or allergy profile. These questions help pharmacist to dispense medicines more appropriately. And if the physician forget or skip his part of giving advice to the patient so here pharmacist can do the job therefore patients come to know the need of pharmacist in society.

The British Association for Counseling (BAC) describes counseling as "giving clients the opportunity to explore, discover and clarify ways of living more resourcefully and towards greater well being".

Another description of patient counseling is "the sympathetic interaction between pharmacists and patients, which may go beyond conveyance of straight forward information about the medicine and how and when to use it". The British National Formulary (BNF) "expects pharmacists will counsel when necessary" and is a little more explicit in defining counseling. It states that:

"Counseling needs to be related to the age, experience, background, and understanding of the individual patient. The pharmacist should ensure that the patient understands how to take or use the medicine and how to follow the correct dosage schedule. Any effects of the medicine on driving or work, any foods or medicines to be avoided, and what to do if a dose is missed should also be explained. Other matters, such as the possibility of staining of the clothes or skin by a medicine should also be mentioned. For some preparations there is a special need for counseling, such as an unusual method or time of administration or a potential interaction with a common food or domestic remedy".

From the above views, it is clear that counseling is the most important role of community pharmacist. In general, it has been estimated that half of the population do not use the drug regimen properly. They have the difficulty to use their medication. So there are different roles by which counseling of patients can be easily achieved. Although many medicines are provided with the label or leaflet but

some patients do not understand the following information written on that. They often misunderstand the instructions. For example: Geriatrics often do not take the medicines in the right time i.e; they often forget to take medicines, they also have a very weak immune system and their normal body functions gets disturbed, so if the dose may skip, there would be a chance of side effect or would be no therapeutic effect, so there is a need to counsel them. Pharmacist has the duty to resolve this problem. He can write the sufficient information on a paper i.e; how to take and when to take the medicines or he can draw a flowchart. So the medicines do not be waste and the cost maintain. (Mills A et.al, 1983)

Pharmacist must listen to his patients first. Sometimes there is a language barrier between pharmacists and patients. Patient from different cities speaks different language, so it is often hard to understand them. Here a pharmacist should be calm enough to understand the patient's problem and efficient enough to pick the relevant information he wants, and he should be wise enough to make a decision. Counseling of such type of patients would be challenge for a pharmacist. A written description regarding medication would be helpful. (Igun U. A, 1987)

It is the responsibility of pharmacist to counsel each patient separately because counseling of each patient in the busy pharmacy or in rush hours can be difficult. Information on a patient's medicines is both private and confidential to them. Some patients feel hesitate in discussing their problems in open environment. So there is a need to develop a separate area or room in the community pharmacy where a patient can give the information satisfactorily. Establishing a professional relationship allows better communication so that the pharmacist will have overall knowledge to give better health care services to the patient. (Kloss H et.al, 1986).

When the physicians prescribe medicines to the patients and these patients visit the retail pharmacy thus the pharmacists and their assistants have the opportunity to provide their services which are both curative and preventive care. They can do by giving them proper health advice and efficient prescribing^[12]. So there is a chance to build a relationship with the patient and gain their trust towards the profession of pharmacy. (Igun U. A, 1987 and Ferguson A, 1988)

It's a fact that a large number of population visits a retail/community pharmacy everyday. Thus it's a great opportunity for a community pharmacist to

work for the patient's health promotion and improvement, give information and also educate them. For example; pharmacist can start smoking cessation program in their community pharmacy setup, diabetic and cardiovascular programs, as well as alcohol or drugs rehab program can also be initiated. Similarly rational use of drugs, tobacco use, discouragement of drug use during pregnancy, organic solvent abuse, poison prevention) or topics concerned with other health problems (diarrhoeal diseases, tuberculosis, leprosy, HIV-infection /AIDS) and family planning (Essn. Med. WHO). They may also take part in the education of local community groups in health promotion, and in campaigns on disease prevention, such as the Expanded Program on Immunization, and malaria and blindness programs (Essn. Med. WHO).

Sometimes patient not only needs information but also an opinion of pharmacist. Here the role of community pharmacy expands, who is not only a drug dealer or a custodian but a wise counselor as well. The pharmacist can compile and maintain information on all medicines, and particularly on newly introduced medicines, provide this information as necessary to other health care professionals and to patients, and use it in promoting the rational use of drugs, by providing advice and explanations to physicians and to members of the public. (Michael D Rawlins, 1991). Pharmacist can also provide his services in nursing homes and in the patient's home as well. For the old patients and patients who are disabled and have this benefit by getting this extended service of pharmacist. In foreign countries, Pharmacist can play a key role in indulging himself in these kind of activities. After this, the vision of pharmacists became very clear in these areas. This will now be extended to include other situations where patients could benefit, such as on discharge from hospital, including highly specialized services, often called the 'hospital at home', where patients may be on palliative care. Extension of the medicines management projects described above to housebound patients will also mean more domiciliary visits, and the development of services to residential and nursing homes has also increased the involvement of pharmacists. (Hayashi S., 2003 and T. McPherson, 2011)

DISCUSSION

The role of community pharmacist in the society has been diversified due to the latest innovation in the dispensing and prescribing drug substances for the patients. In order to have decent and effective

communication a harmony among the three parties i.e; the patients, physicians and the community pharmacist must exist. Hand over the prescribed medications to the patient is not only the pivotal role of community pharmacist. But besides this the patient demands of suggestions and recommendations regarding the prescribed doses, their time interval as well as their directions to use. The role of community pharmacist seems to be highlighted in the future (Hayashi S.,2003).

The role of community pharmacist in the field of health care have been tailored as the one who is knowledgeable enough to render such services that reduces not only the load of medication cost but improves patients adherence towards the drug therapy. Although the community pharmacist most of the time is engaged in prescription filling, dispensing drugs to the patient instead of, being in direct communication with the patient. However in

the previous era, a community pharmacist was well known for providing services in the dose management, allergy checking and dispensing. This role of pharmacist from the modern perspective of pharmacy is not enough. From a patient's point of view a community pharmacy profession is considered to be an obstacle in changing the basis of community pharmacy from distribution of the product to the patient care service. Community pharmacist therefore takes this as their utmost responsibility to provide care to the patient and performing their duty to keep patients involved in their role of maintaining a healthy relationship between a patient and the pharmacist (T.Mc Pherson, 2011).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interests exists.

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