

SATISFACTION WITH THE PROFESSION OF PHARMACISTS, ESPECIALLY DURING THE 2019 CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Pharmacists have been providing essential health services for patients. Their role includes, among other things, dispensing medicines, providing expert advice and participation in screening programs and health promotion. Professional fulfilment is the source of their satisfaction with their work and contributes to positive motivation, affecting their quality of life. Aspects contributing to the level of satisfaction of pharmacists are awareness of helping others, work safety, stress, the possibility of promotion, and workload and atmosphere at the pharmacy. The role of pharmacists is crucial, but sometimes underestimated during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, which directly impacts the level of satisfaction with their profession. While many physicians and nurses fought on the front lines in hospitals, pharmacists in social environments also played an essential role in preventing the spread of the novel coronavirus and contributed to overall crisis management. In addition to ensuring a stable supply of key drugs and becoming a centre for information on coronavirus infection, which is the most common first point of contact, social pharmacists have also been responsible for early detection and appropriate referral of patients.

Rezumat

Farmaciiștii oferă pacienților servicii de sănătate esențiale. Rolul lor include, printre altele, eliberarea de medicamente, oferirea de consiliere de specialitate și participarea la programele de *screening* și promovarea sănătății. Împlinirea profesională este sursa satisfacției lor față de munca depusă și contribuie la motivarea pozitivă, afectându-le calitatea vieții. Aspectele care contribuie la nivelul de satisfacție al farmaciștilor sunt conștientizarea ajutorării altora, siguranța în muncă, stresul, posibilitatea de promovare, volumul de muncă și atmosfera în farmacie. Rolul farmaciștilor este crucial, dar uneori subestimat în timpul pandemiei SARS-CoV-2, care are un impact direct asupra nivelului de satisfacție profesională. În timp ce mulți medici și asistente au luptat în prima linie în spitale, farmaciștii din mediile sociale au jucat, de asemenea, un rol esențial în prevenirea răspândirii noului coronavirus și au contribuit la gestionarea generală a crizei.

Keywords: coronavirus, community pharmacy, job satisfaction, pharmaceutical care

Introduction

Pharmacists occupy various positions in community pharmacies, hospital pharmacies, wholesalers, offices, pharmaceutical companies, social media, clinical trials and many other ventures. In the light of the current systemic reforms that change the perception of pharmacists, diminishing their role in the treatment process, the challenge is to treat pharmacists as people with excellent knowledge and willingness to help, explaining to the patient guidelines for the recommended

therapy. It cannot be disputed that they play a key role in health care. This professional group is one of the most important sources of treatment assistance. They constitute the last significant element in the chain of decision-making and responsibility for health and the patient's life [34]. This is especially noticeable during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Pharmacists are the first line of contact with patients, often putting their health at risk to help patients or provide good and professional advice [2].

Professional fulfilment is the source of their satisfaction with their work and contributes to positive motivation, affecting their quality of life. Aspects contributing to the level of satisfaction of pharmacists are awareness of helping others, work safety, stress, promotion opportunities, autonomy, workload, superiors and colleagues, and justice and atmosphere in the pharmacy [11]. The study aimed to check the level of satisfaction of pharmacists working in a community pharmacy, taking into account the coronavirus pandemic and the consequent changing role of pharmacists.

Materials and Methods

For the study, a literature review was performed mainly using PubMed and Google Scholar databases to identify full-text articles published in English, Polish and German on the changing level of satisfaction and the role of pharmacists, with particular emphasis on the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic. Key articles were retrieved using the terms “satisfaction”, “pharmacist”, “role”, “community pharmacy”, “COVID-19”, “2019-nCoV”, “coronavirus” and “SARS-CoV-2” as keywords for our search. We have included scientific publications on the coronavirus from January 1, 2020, to February 21, 2021, and others from ongoing 2021. In the first stage of the review, the titles of the articles were carefully checked. If the title clearly indicated that the article was outside the scope of our review, the reference was rejected. If the title suggested the presence of data consistent with our interests, the publication was subject to further analysis. In the next step, the abstract was assessed, and, if still possible, the full text was analysed.

Results and Discussion

Satisfaction with the pharmacist profession in the world is diverse and depends on many factors. Low job satisfaction may result from reduced healthcare levels in countries where it is underfunded. An example is the current situation in Iran. There are problems related to insufficient supply, difficult availability of medicines or shortages in the staff. This provides an opportunity for management bodies to take steps to solve problems. Another complication is intellectual disproportions between the general public and pharmacists in underdeveloped countries. As the analysis carried out in Pakistan indicates, the quality of health care in this country is deficient. Only half of the patients expect from the pharmacist knowledge of the therapy, the correct way of taking or information on the safety of the drug substance. In most cases, patients are not interested in services offered by healthcare professionals [31, 45].

Pharmacists developing their careers in various pharmaceutical industry sectors have a lower sense of job satisfaction than pharmacists who have been working only in a community pharmacy since the

beginning of their career. This is confirmed by studies conducted in the USA, as well as in Jordan. The phenomenon of lower satisfaction of hospital pharmacy employees was also observed compared to community pharmacies. Analyses carried out in Jordan show that the introduction of pharmaceutical care in this country dictated fundamental changes in the pharmacist's work. The importance of the patient's individual therapeutic needs was emphasized to fully use the potential and knowledge of pharmacists to increase the availability of health services. Japanese scientists indicate that to avoid disparities in the pharmaceutical market, international exchange of experience is extremely important. Obligations of pharmacists in given countries differ therefore constant cooperation is so important that the quality of services provided is at a similar, high level. In countries where pharmaceutical care has been implemented, pharmacists are not only responsible for distributing drugs - they also offer advice on drug interactions or their proper intake so that the therapeutic effect is the best [1, 21, 26, 29]. Analyses carried out in the USA show the importance of factors influencing the sound quality of pharmacists' work in a generally available pharmacy. The pharmacists perform their duties reliably and smoothly when working in conditions where distractions are minimized. Thanks to this, the quality of patient care is increased, and higher satisfaction with the pharmaceutical consultations is observed [15].

Nowadays, there is a growing migration among the society. This is associated with a change in employment discrepancies in traditions and culture. This phenomenon has had a negative impact on the level of satisfaction of pharmacists in the work environment. A survey in the United Kingdom proves that immigrant pharmacists studying abroad are not satisfied with their profession. They report long working hours, lack of support from employers, and inadequate duties. In addition, they feel excluded from the collaborator community, and they also encounter hostile treatment on the part of patients [57]. Studies have shown that, even though women occupy less attractive jobs, have lower wages, a more significant load of responsibilities and vulnerability to stress, they report a higher level of satisfaction. In addition, compared to men, women value the importance of tasks and social correlations more than remuneration [11-13].

There is a relationship between the length of service, and the satisfaction felt. The study results are as follows: most graduates are satisfied with their work and would choose this career path again [24]. Surveys conducted among pharmacy graduates in Great Britain show an interesting phenomenon: they are increasingly looking for temporary, part-time work for several employers. The number of people interested in permanent position is decreasing. The consequences of such a model can affect the relationship between patients and pharmacists. It has been shown that extending working

time is associated with decreased satisfaction. Studies show that pharmacists' satisfaction can be increased by continuing education, raising their competencies and taking on new challenges at work. The size of the city also has an impact. Pharmacists working in the towns from 20,000 to 100,000 inhabitants are more satisfied with work than those whose pharmacy is located in the countryside [23, 38, 39, 48, 49]. Since December 2019, the world has struggled with a new coronavirus strain that causes SARS-CoV-2 disease. Elderly people or those with co-morbidities are particularly vulnerable to developing illnesses and subsequent complications, which is why COVID-19 causes fear worldwide [5, 44]. Pharmacists can play a significant role in preventing the spread of coronavirus, as they are the most accessible healthcare providers. Their role is invaluable; they can act as public health advisors, increase social consciousness, provide relevant information, advise on preventive measures, and offer expert advice. What's more, they are the main point of

supply with the necessary assortment and can encourage you to wear medical masks or remind you to keep distance when contacting other people [30, 47].

It is also worth mentioning the psychological support provided in the community pharmacy. All this positively affects patients and gives pharmacists great satisfaction for a job well done [2]. Despite the tremendous pressure on pharmacists, people working in the pharmacy are still taking action to help their communities. It is comprehensive, strenuous, frightening and bewildering work because there is a lot to do, and sometimes it becomes emotionally exhausting. Pharmacists are aware that they must be open to patients and help them, especially when there are difficulties in consulting with general practitioners or in a hospital. Many patients appreciate the effort, but not everyone treats the pharmacy staff with respect they deserve [17]. Table I summarizes pharmacists' views on their satisfaction with their changing role with the coronavirus pandemic, which has been published.

Table I
Feeling of satisfaction and perceived changes during the coronavirus pandemic

Publication	Satisfaction	Country
Assiri <i>et al.</i> [7]	The level of satisfaction was analysed among pharmacists qualified to work with COVID-19. Only 14.0% of pharmacists were delighted with their role and contribution to the treatment, while 45.0% had a neutral attitude, and 6.0% were very dissatisfied with the current situation.	Saudi Arabia
Mukattash <i>et al.</i> [46]	In general, pharmacists perceived additional roles as a health obligation and were satisfied to play this role in such a hard time. The role of pharmacists was not limited to their routine, day-to-day services during the crisis but took additional responsibility to ensure patients' safety, satisfaction and access to medicines.	Jordan
Burns <i>et al.</i> [50]	Overall, 56% of pharmacists said their working hours had increased. Out of 1,195 responses to this question, 62% of pharmacists stated that they did not receive additional remuneration for longer working hours.	United Kingdom
Ashiru-Oredope <i>et al.</i> [6]	Over 90% of people admitted that they are slightly worried about the impact of COVID-19 on their person and the pharmacist profession. Almost two-thirds of respondents said it is difficult or complicated to work effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic.	31 countries
Elbeddini <i>et al.</i> [20]	Treating the increased number of scared and frustrated patients requires long working hours and increased responsibility and pressure from pharmacists. The resulting increased workload increases the workload, leading to burnout among pharmacy workers, which has a negative impact on the well-being of the individual and reduces the quality of care provided.	United Kingdom
National survey of community pharmacists and practice challenges during COVID-19 [10]	Moreover, about 73% of pharmacists have struggled with verbal aggression and insults from incoming patients since the beginning of the pandemic.	Canada

With the current pandemic becoming more and more popular, society is looking to all possible ways to minimize the risk of getting sick. In this case, pharmacists play the role of a professional adviser who can verify the correctness and purposefulness of over-the-counter drugs or dietary supplements [36, 40]. As trusted healthcare professionals, pharmacists can strengthen preventive measures such as practising social distancing or reminding you of basic hygiene principles such as washing your hands properly or using disinfectants [14, 35].

Pharmacists must work together and collaborate to actively use their knowledge and skills to participate in medical activities and maximize their value and responsibility in the fight against COVID-19. Countries that the pandemic has severely hit are using pharmacists to help segregate patients [9, 55]. To ensure the continuity of these services, it is imperative that pharmacists are formally involved and involved in managing this pandemic. In addition, there is a need to maximize their involvement in direct patient care [7]. Driven by pharmacists' moral and professional duty to provide services during COVID-19, the most

significant driving force behind pharmacy activities was the ability to prove that they are an integral part of healthcare professionals. Moreover, pharmacists working in pharmacies that took appropriate measures to prevent COVID-19 were more professionally valued by patients and other healthcare professionals during the pandemic [27].

In the current situation, when visits with the physician are difficult, many people go to the pharmacy for advice and an initial diagnosis of the ailment. In Scotland, they gained new entitlements authorizing them to verify drugs that the patient is constantly taking. According to the Act of April 1, 2020, a pharmacist in Poland may offer a pharmaceutical prescription in the event of a health risk related to COVID-19 [52]. In addition, an amendment to the act was prepared in the field of health protection systems related to the prevention and combating of COVID-19. It allowed pharmacists to issue *pro auctore* and *pro familia* prescriptions [53]. Another significant change is removing the limit on the number and size of drug packages that can be included in a pharmaceutical prescription. A pharmacist in Poland will also write out continued prescriptions, i.e. prescriptions for medicinal products, foodstuffs for particular nutritional uses or medical devices that the patient had previously prescribed by a doctor, after a consultation interview at a pharmacy.

Moreover, based on a medical order, the pharmacist should analyse pharmacotherapy and then either supplement the amount of the drug to secure the patient's therapy until the next visit or consult the attending physician in case of problems with compliance or side effects [54]. It is worth mentioning that Canadian pharmacists may prescribe some controlled medications under special circumstances [43]. In Germany, from March 1, 2020, pharmacists have the opportunity to vaccinate patients against influenza, like in Great Britain and Scotland [28]. In the latest study, "Inside Heilberuf", German pharmacists rated their career prospects much better – 45% than in 2016 – 37% [4]. To reduce the movement of people and reduce the number of visits, and thus increase security, in China, doctors and pharmacists provide online consultations, e.g. *via* mobile applications [56]. The dynamically changing situation related to the pandemic and the news in the media increase anxiety and uncertainty among the society. More and more pharmacists are trained to provide mental health advice [25]. Pharmacists remained open to patients in their pharmacies, which made them a place where health advice could be obtained and mental support [32]. The new, most frequently granted, authorizations to pharmacists are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1.

New eligibility for given to pharmacists during the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic [43]

Based on the research, it can be concluded that in Poland, the prestige of the pharmacist profession has significantly decreased in recent years. The problem is the low salary and the insufficient use of their knowledge and potential. The choice of field of study is associated with the future pharmacist with a desire to help patients inform them about side effects, dosing or interaction with other drugs or food. Work is limited

only to drug distribution, and patients do not treat the pharmacist as a competent adviser on pharmacotherapy. Research shows that the problem is also the presence of only one master's degree in the pharmacy during shifts and performing activities unrelated to duties. In some jobs, refusing to sell these products may result in the loss of bonuses or even work. These actions are incompatible with pharmacists' perception of

their work, which always aims to provide absolute assistance to the patient [42].

In highly developed countries, job satisfaction is at a higher level, mainly because of the implementation of pharmaceutical care. Thanks to this, pharmacists feel appreciated and can make the most of their knowledge, ensuring that their needs are met to a greater extent [26].

Since the end of 2019, there has been a breakthrough related to the coronavirus pandemic. Pharmacists, standing on the front line every day, play a significant role as available health consultants, selling essential medicines and helping with minor ailments [3]. Most pharmacists stand up to the task every day and play a huge role in advising in emergencies when choosing medications that complement the patient's current pharmacotherapy or, if possible, prescribe medications that the patient constantly takes to limit visits to specialists [2, 16].

The pharmacist's role has been slowly transforming over the years, from a drug dealer to a drug review supervisor, performing basic tests such as blood pressure measurement and even qualifying to vaccinate patients. The availability of pharmacists is substantial, so it was somewhat used during the coronavirus pandemic. Pharmacists have been gifted with new opportunities to maximize the effectiveness and safety of treatment, despite such difficult times [22, 33]. Pharmacists provide patients with medicines free of charge, educate them, sometimes even *via* telemedicine/telepharmacy, conduct consultations on minor ailments, explain misconceptions about COVID-19 treatment and participate in screening tests [19, 41]. This pandemic has given pharmacists a unique opportunity to be recognized as primary healthcare workers, not only for the tasks they already perform, but also for their extended roles. For example, they have been legally allowed to order and administer COVID-19 tests [51]. This entitlement will be particularly important in the wide availability of test sites to the broader population and will relieve the burden on other healthcare facilities [18].

Conclusions

The SARS-CoV-2 epidemic is a tough time for pharmacists. Every day they are exposed to a potentially infected person. Only in the face of such a tragedy do they have a chance for better treatment and increased rights? The role of pharmacists is being strengthened, who is the only publicly available group of medical specialists. Local pharmacies are the only ones to which patients have direct access on a daily basis, and pharmacists take double responsibility in the process of drug delivery and management and pharmaceutical care [37]. The vision of job satisfaction for many pharmacy students is associated with helping the patient. For pharmacists, the main motivators are the prestige of public trust, independence, autonomy and the

importance of tasks performed. In Poland, job satisfaction could increase the implementation of pharmaceutical care. Nationwide image research indicates that over 70% of pharmacists are willing to provide such services as the review of used drugs, instructions on how to use the inhaler correctly and pressure measurement. Pharmaceutical care is a chance to develop and use the potential of pharmacists to increase satisfaction with their work [8]. The role of pharmacists working in community pharmacies should be strengthened. Pharmacists fulfil key responsibilities, including informing, advising and educating the community; maintaining a stable supply of medicines and personal care products; conducting interviews in questionable cases and making appropriate referrals as necessary [16].

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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