

ETHICS IN PATIENT COUNSELING AND PHARMACEUTICAL PRACTICE BY EMOTIONS MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

A key component of pharmacy practice that aims to guarantee that patients are counseled about their given medications is effective communication. This will increase compliance, reduce uncertainty and confusion, and result in a more logical use of medication with better therapeutic outcomes. Professional associations from several nations have created codes of ethics for pharmacists in order to legally regulate the interactions between pharmacists and patients. Law 81/1997 and Romania's Code of Ethics for Pharmacists ensure that patients' rights and dignity are respected, just like in other nations.

Understanding a patient's emotions may be crucial to guaranteeing positive interactions in the extremely complex field of communication. Addressing patients' emotional reactions to treatment and recognizing their worries or frustrations can help build that bond. We can assist in the development of abilities, resources, and procedures to ensure the best possible patient experiences by closely examining the communication in pharmaceutical practice. In order to ensure high-quality encounters, this research examines a few strategies for understanding a patient's feelings.

The level of communication between patients and pharmacists has a considerable effect on medication counseling. This study aimed to assess pharmacists' medication counseling practices and to evaluate patients' understanding of their medications and satisfaction with pharmacy services at Woldia Comprehensive Specialised Hospital (WCSH). A cross-sectional study involving 23 pharmacists and 339 patients was conducted from February to May 2022 at WCSH. A self-administered structured questionnaire was employed to evaluate the counseling activities of pharmacists, while interview-based questionnaires were utilized to gauge patients' understanding of their prescribed medications and their satisfaction with outpatient pharmacy services. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25.0 was used for data analysis. Approximately two-thirds of the pharmacy professionals (73.9%) reported satisfaction with their counseling activities. However, a small percentage consistently provided counseling on the purpose of medications (13%), significant drug-drug interactions (26.1%), potential side effects (30.4%), the necessity of compliance (30.4%), storage requirements (34.8%), and drug-food interactions (39.1%). Of the 339 patients participating in the study, less than half (46.3%) demonstrated adequate knowledge about their dispensed medications during the exit interview. Only about half of the patients (54.3%) expressed satisfaction with the pharmacy service. Despite a large portion of pharmacy professionals indicating satisfaction with their counseling practices, their involvement in key counseling activities was limited, which adversely affected patients' knowledge about their medications as well as their satisfaction with pharmacy services. This limitation may be due to barriers such as heavy workloads and insufficient resources. The results suggest that there is a need for improvement in pharmacy services by identifying potential gaps and addressing barriers.

Keywords- Ethic, communication, patient-centered care, emotional intelligence, Medication counseling, knowledge, outpatient, satisfaction, pharmacy services, Ethiopia

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), several factors influence an individual's health, referred to as determinants of health. These factors can be categorized into five main groups: (i) clinical health care; (ii) genetic predisposition; (iii) socio-economic factors; (iv) environmental and physical conditions; and (v) personal health behaviors (including tobacco use, diet, physical activity, and substance use) [1,2]. Only the first two determinants, clinical health care and genetic predisposition, have a direct biological link to our health. Socio-economic factors (such as education level, job opportunities, income, marital status, and ethnicity) along with environmental and physical conditions (like living area, air and water quality, building spaces, and transportation) are commonly known as the social determinants of health. Generally, health care services and genetics contribute only 10–20% to an individual's health, while the majority is influenced by social determinants of health and personal health behaviors. Modern medicine adopts a bio-psycho-social model of care, which serves as a comprehensive framework for understanding how illness arises from the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors, along with individual health-related behaviors. The objective of this model is to create a realistic, patient-centered care plan that aims to achieve optimal health outcomes. This implies that all healthcare providers must collaborate as a team to enhance a patient's health while keeping costs down. Although pharmacy practice primarily utilizes medications as the main method of healthcare intervention, the professional and ethical obligations of pharmacists establish a holistic care framework. In their Code of Ethics,

pharmacists commit to prioritizing the patient's well-being and considering both their expressed needs and those determined by scientific evidence. The International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) and World Health Organization (WHO) define good pharmacy practice (GPP) as a pharmacy practice that meets the needs of those receiving pharmaceutical services through the provision of optimal, evidence-based treatments. Evidence indicates that pharmacist interventions during the dispensing process, such as providing counseling, enhance medication adherence and safeguard individuals from drug-related issues. Patient counseling is a crucial service offered by pharmacists, as their involvement in public health settings is significant for optimizing medication use, enhancing patient results, preventing misuse of prescriptions, and reducing expenses. General standards outline the most effective methods for pharmacists to educate and counsel patients about both prescription and over-the-counter drugs. Essential information regarding the medication's name, description, uses, administration method, dosage, usage instructions, treatment duration, precautions, side effects, and contraindications should be conveyed during the dispensing process. All guidelines emphasize the necessity for pharmacists to assess patients' understanding of their prescriptions and customize their care according to each patient's specific requirements.

ETHICS IN THE PHARMACIST-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

Effective interaction between pharmacists and patients is essential for ensuring patient satisfaction and enhancing the correct use of medication and treatment results. In 2000, the WHO introduced the concept of the "Seven Star Pharmacist," which emphasizes the significant role pharmacists play as "communicators." In this regard, pharmacists serve as intermediaries between physicians and patients, and are expected to provide essential health and medical information to patients. Contemporary pharmaceutical services are approached with a patient-centered focus, involving patients in the decision-making process regarding their treatment. The pharmacy setting is where pharmacists leverage their expertise to address both the objective and emotional needs of patients; patients seek solutions to their problems rather than just purchasing products. Thus, effective communication with patients is a crucial aspect of a pharmacist's daily responsibilities. Strong communication skills are necessary for intricate tasks such as conducting medication reviews, encouraging adherence to treatment, and promoting health. Therefore, pharmacists must tailor their communication styles to meet the diverse needs of patients and achieve a patient-centered dialogue.

To legally regulate the interaction between pharmacists and patients, various professional associations across countries have established ethical guidelines for pharmacists. These guidelines encompass both the daily responsibilities of pharmacists and the dynamics of their relationships with patients, fellow team members, and administrative bodies. In the subsequent sections, we will analyze aspects of pharmacist-patient communication outlined in the pharmaceutical ethics codes from various countries.

In the UK, the Code of Ethics for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians outlines three key principles governing communication between pharmacists and patients: pharmacists are required to respect others, encourage patient participation in health-related decisions, and maintain honesty and trustworthiness. The code emphasizes that the primary concern of pharmacists should be the welfare of the patient. Thus, identifying the essential information needed to assess a patient's individual requirements is crucial for delivering suitable treatment. By clarifying how to properly use medications, pharmacists can significantly impact a patient's satisfaction with their treatments. Additionally, the code stresses the importance of accurately recording critical information received from patients and maintaining it in a clear and lawful manner.

Pharmacists are obligated to treat all individuals they encounter, whether patients, colleagues, or others, with respect, politeness, and consideration. They must also safeguard the dignity and privacy of patients by implementing all necessary security measures to prevent unauthorized disclosure of confidential information without the patient's consent. By upholding professional boundaries in their relationships with patients and other individuals they interact with, pharmacists can better protect themselves when working with vulnerable populations.

Another aspect outlined in the UK Code of Pharmacists is the encouragement of patient involvement in decisions about their own health. Patients have the right to participate in the decision-making process regarding their treatment and should be encouraged to collaborate with pharmacists and doctors.

The effectiveness of this collaboration depends on the pharmacist's skill in recognizing the specific needs of the patient. In this partnership, the pharmacist listens to the patient, presents the available options, and assists them in making an informed choice regarding pharmaceutical services or treatment alternatives. The pharmacist must honor the patient's right to decline treatment or any services proposed. By acting with honesty and integrity, the pharmacist should uphold the reputation of the profession through their demeanor. When communicating with the patient, the pharmacist must not take advantage of their vulnerability or lack of understanding, and should provide information in a clear and unbiased manner. The ethical code established by the Pharmacy Council – Malta emphasizes that pharmacists must respect and

safeguard the individual dignity, physical and mental well-being, and rights of patients. Additionally, they should acknowledge personal and cultural differences, beliefs, and values of the patient. Pharmacists must refrain from making judgments or imposing their beliefs on patients, delivering their services with professionalism and consideration.

Pharmacists should develop and sustain professional relationships with their patients to foster and uphold the trust of both patients and society, while safeguarding patient interests by ensuring confidentiality of the information gathered during their practice. In professional interactions, pharmacists are expected to demonstrate honesty and integrity. The information shared with patients, society, and colleagues must be truthful, objective, current, and easily comprehensible. Pharmacists should honor the autonomy of patients, support their participation in health-related decision-making, and uphold an open line of communication with them. In promoting pharmaceutical products or services, pharmacists must not constrain patients' choices regarding their pharmacist or service providers. When communicating with patients, members of the pharmaceutical field should avoid using their titles or positions to undermine other professionals or to endorse specific medicinal or similar products through advertising.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP), pharmacists should offer guidance to ensure that patients receive and comprehend adequate written and oral information to maximize the benefits of their treatment. They must provide tailored information to patients and ensure they understand how to properly use their medications. Pharmacists also need to verify that patients are achieving the intended effects from their prescribed treatments.

Romanian law, as indicated by the Code of Ethics for Pharmacists and Law 81/1997, shares similarities with ethical codes from other nations, highlighting the importance of respecting patient rights and dignity within the pharmacist-patient dynamic. In contrast to the ethical codes examined, the Romanian Code of Ethics for Pharmacists places special emphasis on the involvement of pharmacists in public health education and information dissemination to combat issues like drug addiction, doping, and self-medication. However, there is a lack of reference to the encouragement of patient participation in forming their treatment strategy, a point noted in the codes from the UK and Malta.

DEMONSTRATING EMPATHY AND COMPASSION IN PRACTICE :

Despite the progress made in medical technology, the therapeutic connection between healthcare professionals and patients remains vital for delivering quality care. More crucially, patients should be viewed not only as clinical cases but also as individuals who are confronting challenges and uncertainties. Providing care to patients with compassion, dignity, and empathy is fundamental to the principles of patient-centered care practice. Consequently, pharmacists must possess emotional intelligence during their brief consultations with patients. They need the ability to engage effectively with patients to establish a trustworthy relationship and discuss medication use, ensuring that patients fully understand their treatment objectives and adhere strictly to their prescribed plans, enhancing their quality of life. According to Allinson and Chaar, pharmacists must be cognizant of both verbal and non-verbal communication, actively listen to patients, and exhibit empathy, competence, and confidence to promote open communication and respect cultural differences. Next, we will explore the types of emotions experienced during the four stages of a patient's visit to the pharmacy: (i) the approach, (ii) identifying needs, (iii) making recommendations, and (iv) closing the interaction with loyalty. Throughout the pharmacist-patient conversation, we will identify the elements that aid in managing the relationship and that may affect patients' willingness to return to the pharmacy for pharmaceutical services and ongoing care.

Establish initial rapport : Establishing a meaningful relationship begins with the initial interaction with the patient, as we only have one chance to create a strong first impression. During this moment, we demonstrate our willingness to engage by making ourselves available—not just in terms of time, but also by valuing the patient's viewpoint. A greeting should always be included, especially if initiated by the pharmacist, as this conveys respect and lays the foundation for ongoing loyalty throughout the interaction. A brief, hurried greeting can suggest to patients that their time and issues are unimportant.

Instead, addressing the patient by name with a warm greeting, offering a smile, being attentive, and maintaining friendly eye contact leaves a positive impression and, more significantly, illustrates our commitment to truly listen to the message being conveyed.

Establish the reason for the consultation with needs Identification : Once the discussion starts, the next step is to accurately determine the patient's requirements. Attentive body language, such as maintaining an open posture, making eye contact, and keeping a social distance of two extended arms, along with paralanguage—like using a slightly nasal low voice and adjusting volume and tone—helps convey the pharmacist's sincere concern for the patient. To enhance medication adherence and support shared decision-making, it is crucial to employ skills such as (i) asking open-ended questions and showing genuine interest in the patient's thoughts, (ii) dedicating time to listen to the patient through

active listening and reflecting on what the patient has expressed in your own words, (iii) respecting the patient's perspectives, beliefs, and feelings while avoiding judgments; and (iv) refraining from interrupting the patient.

Recommendation : Once we have identified the patient's needs, we need to present the advantages and benefits of our product as persuasively as possible. This necessitates a thorough understanding of the product in question: (i) the product's characteristics (e.g., its chemical composition), (ii) the benefits provided by these characteristics (how it outperforms alternatives), and (iii) the advantages (how the patient can leverage these benefits). When our suggestion includes a genuine benefit for the patient, it elicits emotions of trust, hope, and astonishment. Conversely, if our suggestion lacks a tangible benefit for the patient, it results in feelings of skepticism, fear, hostility, and disappointment.

Closure with loyalty : Establishing patient loyalty is not something that occurs solely at the conclusion of a conversation. It actually begins from the very first interaction in the relationship. Loyalty hinges on the favourable impression that the patient has developed about both the pharmacy and the pharmacist. Patients who have had their expectations surpassed by the service we provide are likely to return with joy, expressing gratitude for enhancing their day, and seeking us out in times of health or beauty needs. At the conclusion of the conversation, if there are greetings, eye contact, attentiveness, and an invitation to return, the emotions felt are those of trust, hope, and happiness. Conversely, if there is a lack of greeting, eye contact, attentiveness, and an invitation to come back at the end of the discussion, the emotions felt are ones of suspicion, frustration, hostility, and disappointment.

2. CONCLUSIONS

Providing care to patients with kindness, respect, and understanding is essential to the idea of patient-centered care. This requires engaging with patients to gain insight into their overall well-being and views regarding their illness. Establishing this connection may include recognizing patients' emotional reactions to treatment while also addressing their worries or frustrations. Pharmacists must possess the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective practitioners. They must also be capable of communicating, interacting, collaborating, counseling, and guiding their patients, colleagues, and other healthcare team members. Skills such as being aware of their own emotions, comprehending the feelings of others, and having emotional intelligence enable pharmacists to adapt better when addressing challenges and to approach problems with creativity and flexibility in their interactions.

While a considerable number of pharmacy professionals expressed satisfaction with their counseling methods, more than half of the patients lacked sufficient understanding of their prescribed medications. Furthermore, a notable percentage of patients reported dissatisfaction with the pharmacy services. Therefore, it is essential for relevant stakeholders to participate in identifying gaps and addressing obstacles, and their involvement should be encouraged to improve pharmacy services and enhance patient satisfaction. Additionally, future studies should focus on investigating the barriers and possible factors influencing pharmacists' medication counseling practices and hospital pharmacy services.

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