

Recommendations for the role of the pharmacist in Saudi Arabia

Pharmacy profession is an important part of the health-care system. A well-organized pharmacy practice goes a long way to ensure quality health care of the patient. In the past, the responsibility of the pharmacist was only to dispense medicines, but nowadays the traditional role of pharmacist has been modified and pharmacists play a role as a vital team member in the direct care of patients. In the hospital and community pharmacy setting, counseling patients is one of the key roles that pharmacists offer. Counseling of patients has a vital role in the outcomes of therapy. It has been seen that the therapeutic outcome and quality of life have significantly improved through counseling sessions for patients suffering from different ailments like diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, osteoporosis, and psychotic disorders. Furthermore, the general public also consults the community pharmacist as the first choice to seek medical advice for minor ailments. Similarly, the pharmacist also serves as a vital source of drug information for the physician and patients about polypharmacy, perhaps as the only professional who can help in the reduction of drug-related problems, drug interactions, and drug-related effects on blood biochemistry. For example, in a case where there is concurrent administration of enzyme inducers and inhibitors, the pharmacist can play a vital role by providing information about the appropriate dose to attain the maximum possible therapeutic affect of the coadministered medicines.^[1,2] Furthermore in the case of geriatric patients on polypharmacy, the pharmacist plays a major role in therapy compliance and improvement in quality of life through effective counseling sessions. Especially among patients with diabetes mellitus, the pharmacist can help in improving the oral hygiene and physical well-being of the patients.^[3,4]

A study of the community pharmacy setup in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia revealed that unlike community pharmacies in other countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the developed nations, the Saudi community pharmacies are predominantly a commercial venture.^[5] In the Saudi community pharmacy, pharmacists play a role only in the dispensing of medications. In other words, it can be said that the clinical domain of the community pharmacy has not yet emerged in the setting of the Saudi community pharmacy. The developed nations have clearly established the role of the community pharmacist in

the counseling of patients, information, administration, dosage, side effects, and storage of drugs, and drug-drug and drug-food interactions. Now, these developing nations like Australia, United Kingdom, and United States have given prescription rights to the pharmacist. However, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the role of the community pharmacist is still at a very nascent stage. This viewpoint therefore highlights the need for the pharmacy and drug-related authorities to take immediate initiatives to enhance the role of the pharmacist in community practice. Initiatives in this regards will not only improve the therapeutic outcomes but also will help in the eradication of the issues and events that occur due to the lack of health- and drug-related awareness among patients.

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