

The Essential Role of Pharmacists during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A review article

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Abstract

COVID-19 is a pandemic viral infection that caused a hesitated health state for all countries worldwide; being a healthcare professional puts you in crucial responsibilities and drive to be more aware and efficient in managing and controlling this pandemic; the pharmacist has a great role in preventing the COVID-19 from dissemination and providing all healthcare services such as drugs, vaccines, sterilized materials, and sterilization techniques for all healthcare settings, the pharmacist has an essential step in raising the degree of COVID-19 eradication in all countries, in this review, a collection of many articles were reviewed, discussed to conclude that the pharmacist is one of the biggest healthcare professionals. They are working continuously to control this COVID-19 pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus disease, which first broke out in 2019 in Wuhan, China, significantly amplified the role of healthcare professionals in combating a pandemic. The viral disease was highlighted as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11th March 2020 (Visacri et al., 2021). The rapid spread of the disease in the world subsequently caused millions of infections and deaths. The disease was severe because the statistics show that by March 2022, it had been detected in 223 nations resulting in more than 6 million deaths and more than 472 million infections (Casella et al., 2022). The disease was extremely severe to people who had other underlying health conditions. Such individuals were at a high risk of developing respiratory complications and succumbing to the coronavirus. Therefore, immediate response from healthcare professionals was highly necessary throughout the pandemic period. The interventions by the healthcare professionals significantly helped control the spread of the disease and its severity on the global population. The number of recoveries recorded during the pandemic was much higher compared to the number of deaths, thanks to the role of healthcare professionals in combating the severity and infection rates of the global pandemic. This perspective evaluates the important role of pharmacists during the recent pandemic.

Literature Review

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic brought about changes in the roles assumed by pharmacists within the healthcare sphere. The pandemic required pharmacists to expand their roles in order to curtail the spread of infections and, at the same time, ensure community safety. Pharmacists were required to be up to date and gather information from credible sources to raise community awareness as reliable advisors (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Hospital pharmacists made notable contributions to controlling the impacts of the pandemic on people. Alongside other healthcare professionals such as nurses, physicians, and

paramedics, pharmacists innovatively contributed immensely to managing the chaos that erupted due to coronavirus infections (Sami et al., 2021). The professionals did this by implementing sourcing alternatives and conservation strategies to manage critical drug shortages. Pharmacists' efforts to manage drug shortages during the pandemic were vital because of the diminished predictability of shortage and little time for mitigation (Kanji et al., 2020). Pharmacists also helped in managing the pandemic by ensuring a sufficient supply of medication to support beds in the ICU (Ali et al., 2020). Pharmacists also helped by taking part in inpatient rounds. Pharmacists within the medical setup assumed an essential role in identifying drug interactions and reactions, providing consultation and drug information, as well as ensuring the supply of drugs that are not stocked routinely (Jia et al., 2021). Their roles were vital in ensuring that patients access adequate medication to fight against the negative health effects of the coronavirus.

Hospital pharmacists also assumed an essential duty in participating in antimicrobial stewardship programs that were critically important during the pandemic. Hospital pharmacists were directly involved in responding to and planning for pathogen outbreaks and spread. In their participation in the antimicrobial stewardship programs, the professionals were significantly involved in monitoring the utilization of antibiotic drugs in the cases of patients with bacterial co-infections. This undertaking from the professionals was important because viral infections in the respiratory tract such as Covid-19 are a risk factor for bacterial co-infections, which consequently leads to increased mortality and disease severity (Rothe et al., 2021). Thus, the role of the subject healthcare professionals during the pandemic significantly helped in saving many people from adverse health outcomes.

Hospital pharmacists were also heavily involved in the development of local treatment protocols or procedures aimed at repurposing antivirals. Hospital pharmacists were involved in some instances to interpret Covid-19 test results, provide recommendations for medication management to fellow professionals and explore new drug uses and therapies. Hospital pharmacists were also significantly involved in the enrolment of infected patients for studies that aimed at trying treatment options for the causative virus. Healthcare professionals assumed an essential duty within the context of controlled studies to ensure the investigation or assessment of novel experimental agents for the treatment and prophylaxis of coronavirus (Bragazzi et al., 2020). Even though no effective treatment medication was arrived at, a major number of clinical trials were conducted to try medications such as remdesivir and hydroxy-chloroquine (Ito et al., 2020). Pharmacists were hugely involved in the processes of clinical trials. Generally, as shown in appendix 1.0, the responsibilities of hospital pharmacists throughout the pandemic centered around the development of treatment protocols, medication management, provision of medication expertise, management of drug shortages and participation in antimicrobial stewardship accreditation.

Beyond the hospital settings, pharmacists continued to provide vital health support to the global population to address the severity of the coronavirus. In particular, community pharmacists became increasingly accessible to the members of communities. Amidst strict measures and immense pressures brought by the pandemic, community pharmacies remained open (Maidment et al., 2021). With a highly trusted role in community healthcare, community pharmacists closed pandemic-related gaps that were brought by reduced access to healthcare providers and additional strain on the healthcare system. Community pharmacists ensured that necessary care could be provided to attached, unattached, and semi-attached patients who experienced significant barriers to primary care (Isenor et al., 2022). The duty assumed by community pharmacists was significant in low to middle-income nations, whereby a high number of people cannot afford the fees charged in a hospital setting by physicians. In these nations, unequal access to healthcare and restricted resources made community pharmacists increasingly adopt the role of providing direct care to patients (Pantasri, 2021). Community pharmacists would provide free medical advice to patients who could not afford the corresponding healthcare costs. The professionals continued to provide direct care to patients even with a shortage of protective equipment.

The roles assumed by community pharmacists during the pandemic helped many people in the world access health services and information to effectively manage or prevent the spread of the pandemic. As shown in appendix 2.0, the highly accessible pharmacists in different communities were involved in the screening of Covid-19, clarification of myths and misconceptions about the pandemic, free delivery of medications to patients, consultation on minor ailments, and assessment of patients who required renewal of chronic medications. In terms of clarifying myths and misconceptions, pharmacists assumed an important role in combating the Covid-19 infodemic, which mainly involved unsubstantiated therapeutic efficacy claims and exaggerated claims about therapeutic superiority (Marwitz, 2021). The roles of pharmacists during the pandemic drastically shifted and encompassed the provision of pharmacist services through telemedicine and telehealth (Elbeddini et al., 2020). Telemedicine was critical during the pandemic, especially because Covid-19 severely affected the direct provision of care. The use of a telemedicine approach to provide health care ensured that people in self-isolation and high-risk immunocompromised populations could experience optimal medication management.

Community pharmacists significantly enabled a collective response to the pandemic and greatly saved a lot of people from the severity of the Covid-19 pandemic. The professionals managed an effective control of the pandemic by assuming novel roles in public health, such as being vaccinators, testers, screeners, and educators (Durand et al., 2022). Pharmacists in the communities also contributed to the control of the pandemic by ensuring the continuity of pharmaceutical services amidst the health risks presented by Covid-19. The professionals also went the extra mile of adopting novel roles, which significantly saved many people from the severity of the pandemic. As shown in appendix 3.0, pharmacists in the communities adopted extra roles such as providing ambulatory pharmacy services, spreading public health information, and promoting public health efforts such as vaccinations. The roles of these professionals during the pandemic demonstrated that they could be significantly helpful in managing infectious diseases within the context of primary. As a consequence of this observation, pharmacist professionals should therefore be integrated into planning responses during health emergencies.

Conclusion

Pharmacists' contribution to the control of the recent global pandemic was vital. A huge proportion of coronavirus recoveries were recorded mainly because of the measures that healthcare professionals such as pharmacists took to ensure medication supply, education of people, and clarification of misconceptions, among other vital interventions. The professionals within the hospital setting ensured a constant supply of drugs by effectively managing drug shortages. Pharmacists also brought in their expertise in medication management and the development of treatment protocols. Pharmacists also engaged in antimicrobial stewardship programs and helped the people infected with causative virus in the management of their medication. Within the community setting, pharmacists remained to be the most accessible healthcare providers who would consequently help the general population by clarifying myths and misconceptions of the pandemic, ensuring renewal of medication for patients with chronic conditions, screening patients for coronavirus infection, offering telehealth services, being consultants of minor ailments and managing or monitoring chronic conditions in patients. The healthcare professionals also went the extra mile of adopting novel roles such as ensuring vaccinations of the community members, spreading public health information, and promoting the safe usage of antibiotic medications. Pharmacists' role in addressing or mitigating the viral disease had a great and positive impact.

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