

Evaluation Of Value-Added Services And Challenges Encountered By Community Pharmacies Of Sangli District Of India

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Abstract

Retail pharmacy is known as community pharmacy. The management of retail pharmacy is challenging due to various operational and strategic factors. This study aims to evaluate value added services as well as factors affecting community pharmacy practice and to explore potential solutions to resolve these problems. The study focuses on the impact of organized pharmacy and online pharmacy on community pharmacy practices. The study is both explorative and descriptive in nature. A survey method was used to conduct the research study. A total of 157 community pharmacists participated in the survey carried out for 5 months from 1st May 2021 to 30th September 2021. Sale of the pharmacy was associated with value added services as well as challenges faced by community pharmacists. Organized pharmacy and online pharmacy are major challenges for community pharmacies. Fake online pharmacy is an emerging issue these days. To save Indian Traditional Pharmacy Retail Market, there is need of brick-mortar format to upgrade to brick-click format. The practice of brick-click may save business of lacs of retail pharmacies and strengthen them to compete with multinational online pharmacies. Brick-click format may create awareness about fake drugs and save millions of lives.

KEYWORDS: value-added services, community pharmacy, pharmacy practice, challenges

INTRODUCTION

Retail pharmacy is known as community pharmacy. It is utmost common type of pharmacy practice, which serves people to access their medications and get medical advice about their health.^{1,2,3}

PROSPECTIVES OF RETAIL PHARMACY

Indian pharmaceutical market is divided into two parts which are domestic market and export market. Domestic market is divided into retail market and institutional market. Indian retail pharmaceutical market is distributed among unorganized pharmacy, organized pharmacy and online pharmacy.

The management of retail pharmacies is challenging due to various operational and strategic factors. Pharmacists, pharmacy shop owners and managers are expected to be capable enough in managing human resources, finances, marketing, store inventory, management information systems and infrastructure of the pharmacy.³ The skills required to implement these functions including the ability to lead, manage interpersonal relationship and being well-planned, as well as having the strategic planning to find out environmental changes and timely update sustainable responses.^{4,5,6}

To safeguard the health of the population which they serve, and provide various professional services with their knowledge and expertise are the key roles of community pharmacists.⁷ These both, professional healthcare provider and business person role are co-existed since ancient times which requires community pharmacists to move between both persona, in certain situations, these are contradictory.^{8,9,10}

After the pharmaceutical care concept was introduced by Hepler and Strand, the contradictory roles have achieved further prominence.¹¹ Academia and policymakers studied this philosophy. This is a perfect opportunity to build the professional status of community pharmacists.^{12,13} A bunch of services, starting from medicines sale, use, review, disease management, health promotional activities were impinged and earmarked upon community pharmacists to develop and deliver. The application of these services in various countries was not much smooth.^{14,15} Challenges faced by community pharmacists to perform above mentioned roles had been examined, with the consideration of various barriers, parameters and facilitators noted for further actions.^{16,17,18} Generally, community pharmacists lacked confidence levels and adequate time to provide them.^{18,19} Change of management team in pharmacy shop were also tackled by pharmacy staff and hence they are reluctant to shift their roles.²⁰

In low and middle income countries (LMICs), additional challenging factors are faced by community pharmacies in their work profile to orient more professional services. These challenges stemmed from an underdeveloped healthcare system and legislations which do not encourage proper development of pharmacy practice.^{21,22,23} In LMICs, quality of basic pharmacy services such as drug dispensing and patient counselling are much poorer compared to developed nations.²¹ Violation of pharmacy regulations, mainly dispensing of drug by pharmacy assistants and without authentic prescriptions are extensively practiced.²¹ Workforce issues as well as lack of legal recognition from the government, peers in the same field and uniform customers are also common issues.²⁴ Community pharmacists from different countries are facing all these similar difficulties.²⁵

The aim of this study is to evaluate value added services and factors affecting community pharmacy practice and explore the management challenges faced by community pharmacists, existing strategies employed by them to cope and potential solutions to further resolve these problems. The study focuses on the impact of organized pharmacy, online pharmacy on community pharmacy practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The community pharmacy practice faces a challenge related to patient care and change of environment. Pharmacy practice profession has evolved from traditional drug focused service to an advanced patient care basis service over the years. Pharmacists need to change their image from a health care professional rather than a drug seller.

There are several challenges viz.

- ✓ Lack of basic infrastructure such as management systems,
- ✓ Lack of basic infrastructure for drug product storage and distribution
- ✓ Poor quality control over pharmaceuticals
- ✓ Inadequate training and monitoring of dispensers and prescribers
- ✓ Inappropriate instruction of patients concerning medication use²⁶

Significant associations were observed between issues related to price war and work experience in Penang. 'Price war' and inconsistent bonus scheme for pharmaceutical products was a major challenge. The suggestion of price regulation of medicines and strict monitoring to stop unhealthy practices was needed in the retail pharmacy business.²⁷

Dispensing medication is primary job of community pharmacies, other pharmacies counsel patients, keep patient medication profiles and check for drug interactions.

Modern community pharmacy practice involves generic drug selection, therapeutic interchange, and pharmacotherapy consultations. Public education programs are also included in such practices.

Many community pharmacists are taking initiative in counselling, education, and screening programs for various diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. Where some community pharmacists have taken initiative for creating awareness about prevention of diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and AIDS in patients.²⁸

Community pharmacy practices are ruled by various laws such as Drug & Cosmetics Act as well as NDPS Act, etc. The regulation contains equipment, staff, storage conditions, space etc. are not appropriate to comply with upcoming challenges in community pharmacy practice. As per current laws, there is a need for change in community pharmacy practices.

Good Pharmacy Practice (GPP) is required concept and there is need to formulate agency for accreditation of community pharmacies to ensure quality and standards of pharmaceutical care.

Current pharmacy practice is performed as business rather than as a profession.

Currently, there is new form of community pharmacy practice i.e. "drug use control" and "patient oriented practice".

There are several challenges faced by community pharmacists such as sale of medicines without prescriptions, discounts, undercutting, sale of physicians' samples and expired goods, minimum distance between two pharmacies, area of pharmacy premises, payment for drugs, to cut strips and sell medicines, selling a part of the prescription, and managing prices to suit the client's pockets, patients do or do not come again for the rest of prescription, storage and temperature maintenance, pharmacies located on busy roads are exposed to dust, medicines are exposed to different temperatures in transportation, prescribing by brand name, no space to stock, prescription bounce, dispensing doctors, presence of pharmacist in pharmacy shop (Uttar Pradesh - 20,000 pharmacists, and retail licenses are about 60,000.) and concept of Good Pharmacy Practice etc.²⁹

- ✓ Online pharmacy is a need of future. This is comment of 90% of respondents.
- ✓ Online pharmacy is a convenient way to purchase medicines which are reported by 76% of respondents.
- ✓ Convenience in the selection of location and time for the delivery will be more advanced and popular feature of online pharmacy in future.
- ✓ Quality of drugs can not be compromised with online pharmacies.
- ✓ Value added services such as cancellation of orders, reimbursement in online purchase, and tracking of orders are enjoyed by 72% of respondents.³⁰

The study concluded that the points to be taken into consideration are the prevention of illegal sale of the drugs and end motive of securing our health. The fact remains that drugs purchased at online drug stores offer high levels of handiness put forward privacy for the buyer as well as safeguard traditional procedures of prescribing drugs. Thus, consumers can use these services with the same confidence as they would have had in the neighbourhood pharmacist. But they must stay away from "rogue sites" that sell unapproved products or sidestep conventional procedures that safeguard the interests of consumers.³¹

There are 5 factors which influence store preference. These are store ambience, convenience, merchandise options, sales promotion, and services.

Store ambience - Store layout and design, Entertainment / Refreshment facilities, lighting, sound, scent, driving trolleys etc.

Merchandise Options - Product quality, display of merchandise, availability of branded products, wider range of products

Services - Reasonable prices, responsive sales personnel, exchange guarantee, convenient payment options

Sales Promotions - Frequency of special sales, promotional coupons and offers, parking facilities

Convenience - Express checkout, queue for billing and prompt service

Technological support has three variables such as comfort, modernization and virtual reality. These variables will show amazing effect on store choice in the future.

It is an important path of success for offline retailers to adopt technological support to ensure better customer attachment as well as to compete online retailing.

Digitisation of the retail sector has three different facets of the interchange: interaction, payment and delivery.

Digital business is need of traditional retail business in upcoming years.³²

Government of India should define rules and regulations for online pharmacies. They should implement a clear operating model for benefit of the society and consumers.³³

HYPOTHESIS OF STUDY

- 1 - Organized pharmacy has impact on community pharmacy practice.
- 2 - Online pharmacy is major challenge for rural area community pharmacy.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To study growth of community pharmacy with respect to geographical location of the outlet.
2. To evaluate value added services of community pharmacy.
3. To evaluate challenges influencing community pharmacy practice.
4. To study effect of organized pharmacy and online pharmacy on community pharmacy.
5. To study potential scope and solutions to factors affecting community pharmacy.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is both explorative and descriptive in nature. A survey method was used to conduct the research study.

SAMPLING DESIGN

Sampling Method:

Quota sampling method was used.

Respondents:

Pharmacist from community pharmacy outlets of Sangli district of India

DATA COLLECTION

Questionnaire was the main instrument of research and it was designed to evaluate value added services and to assess the factors influencing community pharmacy practice. The questionnaire was administered to the identified target participants; these were community pharmacists of selected pharmacies of Sangli district. This was the main source of primary data.

SAMPLE SIZE DETERMINATION

Pharmacists:

Researcher has adopted quota sampling method. 157 community pharmacists have participated in the study.

10 % of 1570 (Total Community Pharmacies in Sangli District) = 157

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 157 community pharmacists participated in the survey carried out from 1st May 2021 to 30th September 2021 for the period of 5 months. Among the studied 157 participants, there were 123 (78.34%) males and 34 females (21.66%); 102 (64.96%) participants were urban and 55 (35.04%) participants were rural.

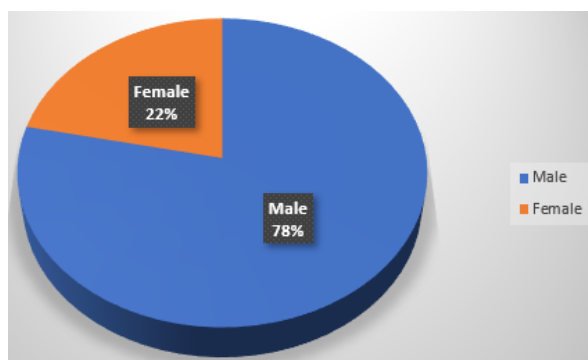


Figure No. 1

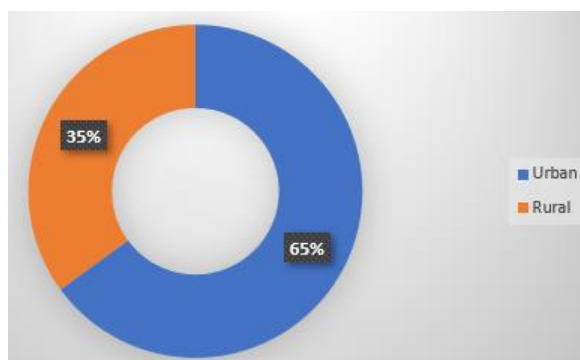


Figure No. 2

Services Provided by Retail Pharmacy:

In sale related services, drug selling is the only service which is provided by all community pharmacies (157, 100%); followed by cosmetics, food products and packaging materials etc. (Fig. 3)

In health services, community pharmacies do not provide most of the services. About 10% of services are provided by community pharmacies. (Fig. 4)

Community pharmacy's infrastructure is very poor. Only 72 (45.85%) pharmacies provide drinking water facility and 33 (21.01%) pharmacies provide sitting arrangement. LED and Air Conditioning services are not provided by most of the pharmacies. (Fig. 5)

Current community pharmacies are much behind in technology services such as SMS, Telephonic Communication, Greetings and Social Media presence. More than 90% of pharmacies are not available on social media. (Fig. 6)

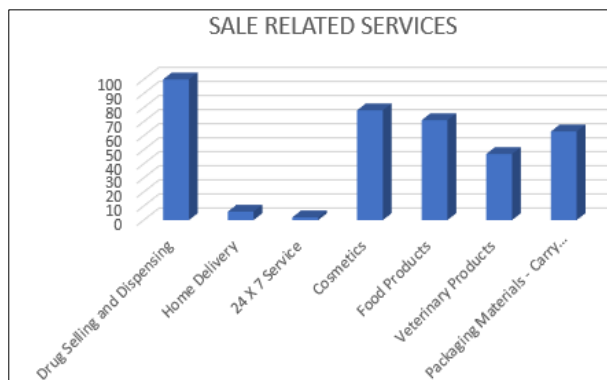


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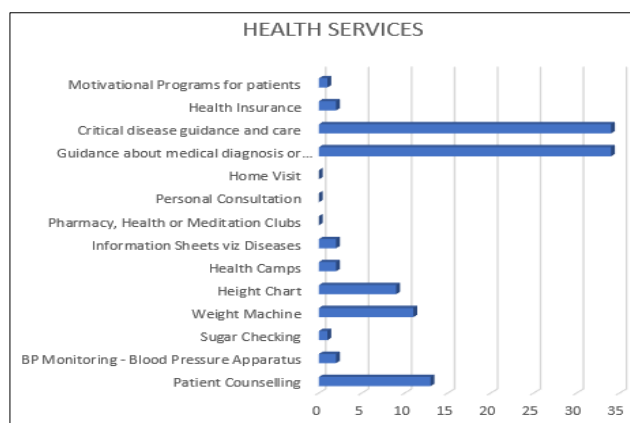


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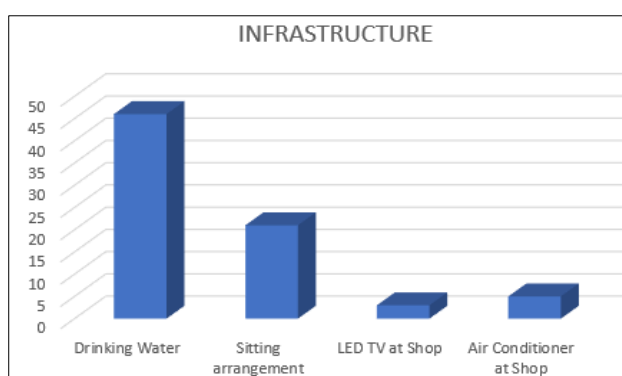


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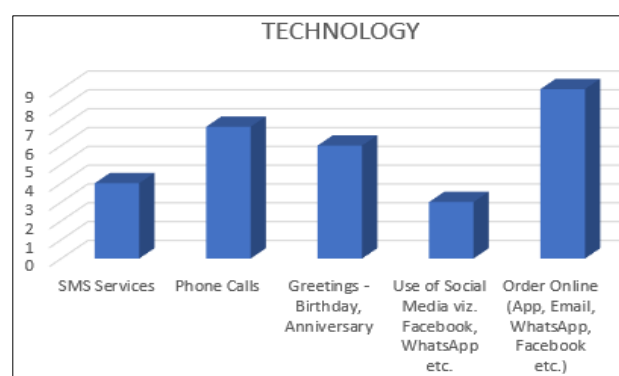


Figure No. 6

Problems Faced by Retail Pharmacy:

There are several challenges faced by community pharmacists.

Product related problems; generic (57, 36.30%) is the challenging factor for community pharmacies. (Fig. 7)

Workforce related problems; staff is a problem reported by 97 (61.78%) community pharmacies. (Fig. 8)

Competition related problems; new entry of other pharmacy (152, 96.81%), online pharmacy (121, 77.07%), hospital attached pharmacy (91, 57.96%) and organized pharmacy (88, 56.05%) are leading challenges for community pharmacies. (Fig. 9)

Infrastructure; parking space (75, 47.77%) and absence of counselling space (115, 73.24%) are reported by community pharmacies. (Fig. 10)

Supply related problems; goods shortage (28, 17.83%) is not big challenge but stockiest scheme is reported by 86 (54.77%) pharmacies. (Fig. 11)

Financial problems; financial capital (132, 84.07%), customer reject to pay for other services (138, 87.89%) and lack of confidence to invest in other services (127, 80.89%) are uppermost challenges. (Fig. 12)

Technical problems; lack of recognition (99, 63.05%) and non-availability of training programs (99, 63.05%) are challenges faced by most of the community pharmacies. (Fig. 13)

Regulatory problems; license (9, 5.73%), audit and inspection (20, 12.73%) and other legal issues (13, 8.28%) are not major challenging factors for community pharmacies but Tax structure is a key challenge for 132 (84.07%) community pharmacies. (Fig. 14)

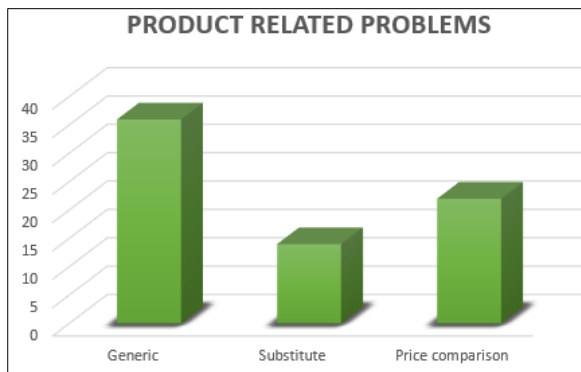


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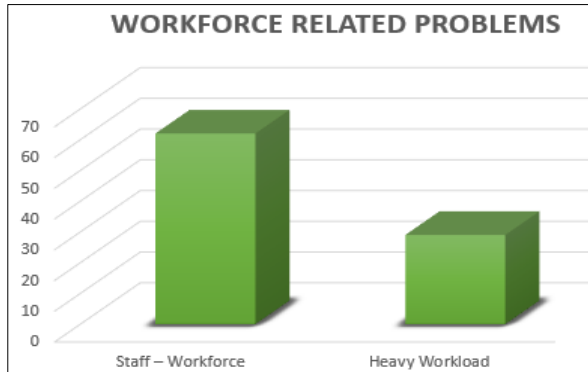


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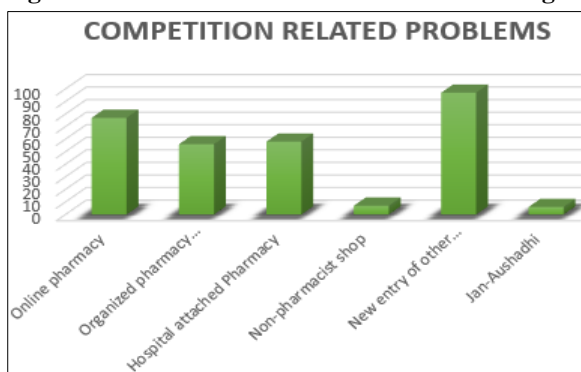


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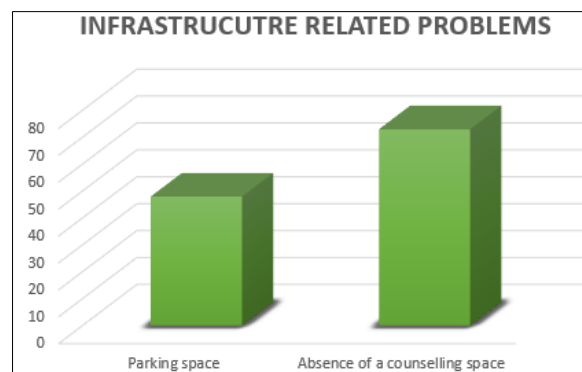


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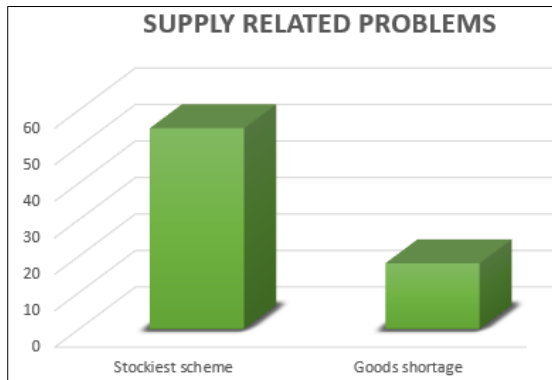


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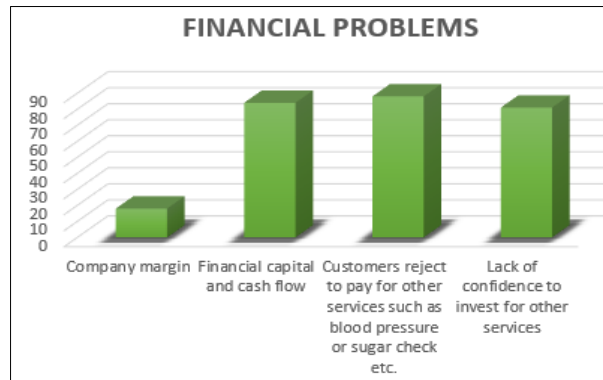


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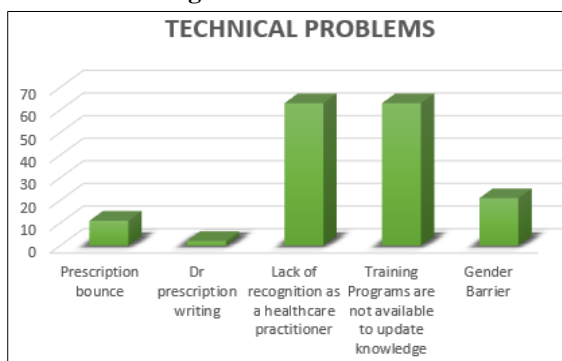


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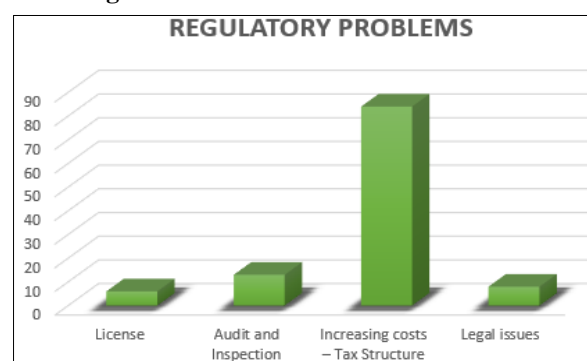


Figure No. 14

Study shows that urban pharmacies provide more value added services than rural pharmacies. Practice of sale related services, health services, infrastructure and use of technology are more prevalent in urban community pharmacy.

Competition related problems, infrastructure related problems are less in rural community pharmacy practice but product related problems, workforce related problems, supply related problems, financial problems, technical problems and regulatory problems are equally influencing urban and rural community pharmacy.

Sale of the pharmacy was associated with value added services as well as challenges faced by community pharmacies.

Value added services and challenges of community pharmacy do not show any significant impact on average percentage growth per year of community pharmacy.

Average turnover value is higher in urban community pharmacies as compared to rural community pharmacies.

There is significant impact shown by organized pharmacy on community pharmacy.

Online pharmacy is a major challenge for urban community pharmacy as well as rural community pharmacy.

Geographically, there is no significant difference in growth of community pharmacy.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Retail pharmacy business should consider primarily four major factors. These are

- 1) Focus on the patient
- 2) Focus on systems and processes
- 3) Focus on measurement
- 4) Focus on teamwork.

2. There is a need to create an accreditation authority for retail pharmacies to ensure high standards of pharmaceutical care.

3. Developed countries have formed regulatory bodies to authorize the online pharmacies list such as Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites (VIPPS) in the USA, Canadian International Pharmacy Association (CIPA) in Canada and General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) in the United Kingdom.

In India, there is a need to develop such regulatory bodies and website which will display an authorized list of online pharmacies to prevent malpractice of counterfeit drugs. Awareness about fake drugs can save millions of lives every year.

4. To save Indian Traditional Pharmacy Retail Market, there is a need of brick-mortar formats to upgrade to brick-click formats. This might be very helpful and time-saving method which will benefit lacs of retail pharmacists to survive their business and to face competition of multinational online pharmacies.

5. The study is an attempt to find out probable prospective solutions to overcome the currently encountered challenges of community pharmacy practices.

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Conflict of interest: Nil

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