

Views of Community Pharmacists in Managing Retail Pharmacy along Sta. Maria, Bulacan

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to assess the challenges that retail pharmacies faces in its management and operations in Sta. Maria, Bulacan, Philippines. A questionnaire-based cross sectional survey was conducted on thirty registered retail pharmacies in Sta. Maria, Bulacan. The mean of the response for every question was obtained to know the overall view of community pharmacists and the data were grouped by working position and was analyzed using t-test. The community pharmacists agreed that pharmaceutical price war was one of the main obstacles to ethical pharmaceutical practice. Pharmacists agreed on the proposed required certification of all pharmacy assistants in practice and that there was no enough qualified non-pharmacist staff to assist in the duties of the pharmacist. The researchers recommend monitoring prices of pharmaceutical products, to provide skills enhancement program or to include training program of non-pharmacist staff to acquire necessary skills in operating a pharmacy.

Introduction

Retail pharmacy business has been very common in the Philippines for the past few years. It has been an established industry in the community, especially in the provision of health among the basic units of the society. Its role in the community, and the attractiveness of owning a retail pharmacy as a business has been the main reasons why pharmacists are enticed to run a said type of business. Some common reasons why pharmacists are engaged in starting up a business are the flexible working hours, free flow of cash, guaranteed customers patronizing the products and community engagement of the business. Moreover, pharmacists had gained knowledge and skills in running up a business due to the educational training gained in respective

institutions through the subject pharmacy administration and management. Through these learning, pharmacists are equipped with the necessary information needed to put up a business and are competent enough in order to run the pharmacy.

However, considering the framework of retail pharmacy business, the day to day operations of the pharmacy requires tedious effort to maintain and these are the multiple challenges that a pharmacist may face. The change in the business world is very eminent that reaches to a point that it becomes a serious threat to business survival, especially with the businesses in the rural areas of the Philippines, and one of which is at Sta. Maria, Bulacan. Within this context, the business of

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retail pharmacy in the Philippines is facing multiple challenges.

Aside from the fact that the law mandates the presence of a registered pharmacist in operating a pharmacy business, pharmacists may also play the role of storekeeper, clerk, purchase officer, and as supervisor or manager. This multi-tasking of pharmacist is one of the main reasons for his important role in society along with this another role of pharmacist isto council patients about their drugs and help them understand their medication is greatly compromised, considering the context of running a pharmacy business. In the Philippines, competition in pharmacy is very evident from small scale pharmacy business up to large business chains of drugstores. Therefore, some proprietor (often the pharmacist) spends plenty of time and effort in searching low cost medicines and then to sell at an affordable price in order to compete and stay alive in the business.

For the past few years, chain pharmacies, especially of those with generic medicines, in the Philippines had boomed and competition rises against these chain pharmacies with small scale pharmacy businesses. Some pharmacies are forced to close due to debts and loss of revenues. Therefore this research is aimed to assess what are the common challenges that retail pharmacies may face in its management and operations in the selected rural area (Sta. Maria, Bulacan) in the Philippines.

Materials and Methods

Research instrument

A 15 itemed questionnaire was utilized to know the views of community pharmacists practicing in Sta. Maria, Bulacan on the difficulties faced while operating the pharmacy. In addition to the demographic variables asked, there were 10 items framed into a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire used in this test was a questionnaire validated at the School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, UniversitiSainsMalaysia. The questionnaire was piloted for validation and reliability analysis of the final response of the question yielded an alpha value of 0.70. (Hassali et al.). The significance level was 0.05.

Study design and setting

The study was designed as a cross-sectional survey. 30pharmaciesin Sta. Maria, Bulacan were selected for data collection. The

pharmacists were given the questionnaire and were asked to answer the questions as honest and accurate as possible. Sta. Maria, Bulacan was chosen because of its competitiveness in the retail sector of pharmacy.

Statistical analysis

Frequency distribution of the answers with the corresponding percentages were computed and presented to know which possess the greater challenge in the management of a retail-based pharmacy. The mean of the response for every question was then obtained to know the overall view of the community pharmacists. The data were then grouped by working position and was analyzed using t-test to understand the differences in the point of view of the owner and the employee pharmacist.

Results and Discussion

Data in Table 1 show that majority of the community pharmacist in Sta. Maria, Bulacan agrees that pharmaceutical price war is one of the main obstacles to ethical practice of the profession. Fourteen (14) and seven (7) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed respectively, while seven (7) of the respondents remain neutral. Some explained that in order to be competitive, they have to lower the cost of their medicines, as a result, the pharmacy cannot hire enough pharmacy staff to serve their customers better.

Fourteen (14) and four (4) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed respectively that the economic downturn in the Philippines has affected their revenues, while twelve (12) remained neutral stating that medicines are a basic commodity and people would still prioritize purchasing their medications among other things, because of that their revenues are not affected with the Philippine economy today.

Majority of the respondents (14-agree & 4-strongly agree) believed that these changes in the practice of pharmacy and regulatory requirements will have a positive impact on their practice. Many of the proposed law like requiring the Pharmacy Assistants to undergo training and have a National Certificate (NC III) would help the community drugstores deliver a better service to their customers. While many of them agreed, some remained neutral, though they believed that these changes would be beneficial to the customers/patients, they were afraid that if their pharmacy assistant becomes a NC III

holder, they have to increase their salary and some small pharmacy owners were afraid that their business cannot survive if they have to increase salary expenses and still have the same revenue.

Respondents were asked if they think that a law should be implemented to limit the number of new pharmacies opening adjacent to an existing pharmacy location, researchers obtain different responses. Majority (7-strongly agree & 9-agree) agreed that this law should be implemented because it will eliminate strong competition, majority of pharmacist/owner strongly agree about this. Some disagreed/strongly disagreed regarding this matter they believed that equal opportunity should be given to everyone who wants to open a pharmacy.

Regarding information and communications technology, majority of the respondents stated that there are no incentives coming from the government, some remains neutral because they believed that upgrading their technology is the responsibility of the owner. A small portion disagreed and believed that the government is trying its best to help them.

Distributors and manufacturers sometimes give additional incentives to their customers. This comes in the form of product deals and discounts. Majority of the respondents were neutral, they believe that this incentives does not affect their practice since it is only an additional income from them, computation of the products price still depends on its original price.

Recently, the government is passing the law requiring that pharmacy assistants should be certified competent to perform their duties, because of this, majority of the respondents believe that there is an acute shortage of the competent or qualified pharmacy assistants. Respondents states that there is only a few institutions offering NC III certification and some of their pharmacy assistants cannot afford to enroll in such institutions.

Recent graduates were equipped with this skills in management because Pharmacy Administration and management was now included in the curriculum of BS Pharmacy. Some of the pharmacist who do not have this subject when they were in college stated that

they acquire these skills through practice so majority of the respondents were neutral about this.

Table 1: Retailed pharmacist response to study questions

Questions	SD	D	N	A	SA
Pharmacist's price war is one of the main obstacles to ethical practice among many retail pharmacies	0	0	9(30)	14(46.7)	7(23.3)
The current economic downturn has directly affected my pharmacy revenue	0	0	12(40)	14(46.7)	4(13.3)
I foresee the proposed community pharmacy benchmarking requirement by regulator and pharmacy professional body's will have a positive impact on my current practice	0	0	9(30)	17(56.7)	4(13.3)
A law should be implemented in order to limit the number of new pharmacies opening adjacent to an existing pharmacy location	3(10)	3(10)	4(26.7)	9(30)	7(23.3)
There is lack of incentives from	3(10)	0	4(13.3)	14(46.7)	9(30)

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government of upgrading information and communications technology facilities in the pharmacy					
Inconsistent bonus schemes for buying pharmaceutical products from distributors and manufacturers have an impact on my present practice	3(10)	0	11(36.7)	9(30)	7(23.3)
There is acute shortage of qualified non pharmacy staff that is capable in assisting me in my daily practice	0	0	11(36.7)	12(40)	7(23.3)
Lack of management skills does not hinder me in generating good profits for my pharmacy business	3(10)	4(13.3)	11(36.7)	2(6.7)	10(33.3)
All the community pharmacies should be 100% owned by registered pharmacist rather than a business person or	0	4(13.3)	14(46.7)	6(20)	6(20)

through partnership basis					
Lack of capital has no impact on the success of my business	0	7(23.3)	12(40)	11(36.7)	0

Respondents are asked in their perception of whether they believe that drugstores should only be owned by a registered pharmacist or at least a partnership between a pharmacist and another proprietor. Majority of the respondents are neutral in this matter. Some agrees because they believe that this will help eliminate drugstores with ghost pharmacist. Only a few disagree, stating that equal opportunity should be given to all.

Having a big capital is edge in a business, bigger capital may mean more budgets for marketing activities, more assortments of products and the like. Respondents are asked if they believe that lack of capital has no impact on their business. While majority remains neutral, some agrees that it has no impact because they believe that a small capital is enough if the owner/manager knows how to allocate their resources. A few disagree and believes that having a lot of capital is needed for success.

Based on the analysis of the mean of the questions as shown in Table 2, the overall consensus was that community pharmacist agree that pharmaceutical "price war" is an obstacle in the management of retail-based pharmacy. This is due to constant and sometimes consecutive changes in the prices of the drugs that are being sold making it hard to predict future revenue of the pharmacy. The respondents also agree that the current low state of the economy had directly affected the income of the pharmacy. The pharmacist also agree on the proposed required certification of all Pharmacy Assistants in practice and most agree that there is not enough qualified non-pharmacist staff to assist in the duties of the pharmacist. With regards to the inconsistent bonus schemes, the respondents affirmed that this had an impact in their practice of pharmacy. The respondents also noted that there is lack of government support in provision of facilities and technology that will

be able to assist in the community setting. The respondents answered neutral (neither agree nor disagree) to the limitation of the number of pharmacies thatcher is being opened in a given area. The respondents are also neutral on whether management skills is needed to generate a profit, if a registered pharmacist should be the owner of a pharmacist and if capital has an impact in the success of the business.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of retails pharmacists answers to study question

Questions	Mean	Interpretation
Pharmacists price war is one of the main obstacles to ethical practice among many retail pharmacies	3.93	Agree
The current economic downturn has directly affected my pharmacy revenue	3.73	Agree
I forsee the proposed community pharmacy benchmarking requirement by regulator and pharmacy professional body's will have a positive impact on my current practice	3.83	Agree
A law should be implemented in order to limit the number of new pharmacies opening adjacent to an existing pharmacy location	3.47	Neutral
There is lack of incentives from government of upgrading information and communications technology facilities in the pharmacy	3.87	Agree
Inconsistent bonus schemes for buying pharmaceutical products from distributors and manufacturers have an impact on my	3.57	Agree

present practice		
There is acute shortage of qualified non pharmacy staff that is capable in assisting me in my daily practice	3.87	Agree
Lack of management skills does not hinder me in generating good profits for my pharmacy business	3.40	Neutral
All the community pharmacies should be 100% owned by registered pharmacist rather than a business person or through partnership basis	3.47	Neutral
Lack of capital has no impact on the success of my business	3.13	Neutral

Conclusion

The researchers aimed to assess the challenges faced by retail pharmacists in managing their pharmacy. Based on the data collected and interpreted, the respondents from the pharmacies at Sta. Maria, Bulacan regarded the pharmaceutical "price war" as the top challenge in the management and operation of pharmacy. The price was considered to be a crucial obstacle for consumer access to essential drugs. Lowering the cost of the drugs attracts more patients and customers to that specific pharmacy, thereby affecting competing pharmacies, resulting for them to lower their prices also. But with this strategy, the owner must be able to negotiate lower acquisition cost with manufacturers to maintain inventory.

Other significant result was regarding the qualified non-pharmacy capable of assisting the pharmacist in the day to day operation of the pharmacy. Pharmacists are equipped with the necessary skills to manage and operate a pharmacy but non-pharmacy staff dealing with the professional practice of pharmacy lacks specific skills required for such. This information could be significant especially for the upcoming upgrading of the education system of the Philippines and the passage of a new bill for the practice of pharmacy, for the

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inclusion of a specific subject dealing with this matter to be able to provide the skills needed by non-pharmacy staffs.

Recommendation

The researchers recommend to monitor prices of pharmaceutical products to be able to regulate the unhealthy competition that may rise between pharmacies due to "price war." Furthermore, the researchers recommend to provide a skills enhancement program or at least to include a program in the training of non-pharmacist staff to be able to acquire necessary skills in operating the pharmacy in a day to day basis.

The delimited area covered by the research was only a portion of the province of Bulacan. Furthermore, the results are not generalized as the practice stings are expected to be different in the cities and municipalities of Bulacan and may be entirely different in the practices at the National Capital Region. The researchers recommend to perform a wider study to investigate the issue in hand in a much broader context.

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