

Perceptions and Expectations of Consumers Concerning Community Pharmacists' Image

Selen ONARAN*, İsmail ÜSTEL*

Perceptions and Expectations of Consumers Concerning Community Pharmacists' Image

Summary : Especially in the last decades, together with clinical pharmacy practice in the western countries, there has been positive changes for pharmacists' professional identity. In this study, pharmacist's image is surveyed in two socio-economically different quarters of Ankara (Çukurambar and Küçükesat). In Çukurambar, 83 % of the respondents stated that pharmacists themselves dispensed their prescriptions in the pharmacy while this ratio was 67 % for Küçükesat.

Of the 50 respondents in Çukurambar, 47 indicated that the pharmacist displayed personal attention while providing professional service (94 %), this ratio was 82 % for Küçükesat. In Çukurambar 70 % of the respondents felt that the pharmacist was professionally knowledgeable, this figure being 60 % in Küçükesat. In both quarters, more than 75 % of the respondents stated that the pharmacist was a health professional in the first place. In both quarters, consumers expected the pharmacist to be knowledgeable, personally involved, friendly, good looking, providing quality service, being honest and not demonstrating a merchant attitude.

In both quarters, respondents ranked the pharmacy profession in the third place according to its importance for the community.

Key words: Pharmacist, Pharmacy, Community Pharmacist, Clinical Pharmacy, Health Professions

G.T. : 11.12.1995

K.T. : 31.7.1996

INTRODUCTION

During this century, pharmacy profession is affected from the rapid development of technology and welcomed many innovations. In this context, the pharmacist and his / her function have undergone dramatic changes both in personal orientation and professional activity¹⁻³.

Toplumun Eczacının İmajına İlişkin Düşünceleri ve Beklentileri

Özet : Son yıllarda, özellikle batıda klinik eczacılığın uygulamaya geçirilmesiyle eczacıların mesleki kimliklerinde olumlu yönde gelişmeler göze çarpmaktadır.

Bu araştırmada, sosyo-ekonomik düzeyi farklı iki ayrı semtte (Çukurambar ve Küçükesat) oturan kişilere, eczacının imajına ilişkin anket uygulanmıştır.

Çukurambar'da kişilerin % 83'ü reçetelerini, eczacının karşıladığını belirtirken, bu oran Küçükesat'ta % 67'dir. Çukurambar'da görüşülen 50 kişiden 47'si (% 94), eczacının hizmet verirken ilgili olduğunu belirtirken, Küçükesat'ta bu oran % 82'dir. Çukurambar'da eczacıyı bilgili görenlerin oranı % 70 iken, Küçükesat'ta bu oran % 60'ur. Her iki semtte de tüketicilerin % 75'ten fazlası eczacıyı, ilk planda sağlık elemanı olarak görmektedir. İki semtte de, eczacıda bulunması istenen nitelikler; bilgi, ilgi, güleryüz, temiz-düzenli giyim, iyi hizmet, dürüstlük, eczacının ticari olmaması şeklinde sıralanmıştır.

Her iki semtte de kişiler eczacılık mesleğini toplum için arzedtiği öneme göre üçüncü sıraya koymuşlardır.

Anahtar kelimeler : Eczacı, Eczacılık, Serbest Eczacı, Klinik Eczacılık, Sağlık Meslekleri

Prior to the industrial revolution, the pharmacist personally compounded a large proportion of the remedies used in medical practice. With the emerging of large-scale drug manufacturing, the function of compounding almost completely removed from the domain of the pharmacist, leaving as his / her most prevalent duty to the rational dispensing of pre-packaged medications. That is, in other words; dis-

* Department of Pharmacy Management, School of Pharmacy, Hacettepe University, 06100, Hacettepe, Ankara - TURKEY.

pensing the right drug, to the right patient, in the right time, in the right dosage form, in the right amount, explaining the right route of administration, delivering the right information to the patient and preparing the right records⁴.

Especially in the early 1970s, with clinical pharmacy's coming into the agenda and being reflected in the pharmacy curriculum, pharmacists began to respond to community's drug information needs. Then, they have undertaken drug information counseling role in many settings as clinical pharmacists⁵⁻⁷. After clinical pharmacy movement's contribution to a new perspective for the profession, the community began to view the pharmacist in a new perspective that he / she is more than just a figure behind a counter^{8,9}.

A recent gallup poll in USA, ranking twenty-five professions for honesty and ethics, indicated that two-thirds of those surveyed ranked pharmacists as the most respected of all professionals¹⁰. Besides, a number of studies have demonstrated that the community pharmacist is regarded by most people as a source of reliable advice on health matters¹¹⁻¹³.

In 1973, Dichter Institute conducted a nationwide survey concerning pharmacist / pharmacy image among community members in USA with impressive results¹⁴. First, respondents stated that the pharmacists do not communicate with the patients. Also, the patients expect - and indeed, want- personal attention and professional services from the pharmacist. On the other hand, respondents indicated that they view the pharmacist as a partner sharing the physician's responsibility for the appropriateness, of the prescription. One of his / her prime roles, the respondents stated, is to make sure that the patient is informed on how and when to use the medicine.

The purpose of this study is to understand the residents' perceptions and expectations concerning community pharmacist's image.

MATERIALS and METHODS

In this research, interview survey technique is applied. Pre-testing is performed in two socio-economically different quarters in Çankaya district, Çukurca and Yukarı Ayrancı. After the pre-test, some questions in the questionnaire were excluded or their sequence changed, and more close-ended questions were added. Both in Küçükesat and in Çukurambar households are selected by using sample random sampling technique. Interviews were done with the one who went to the pharmacy mostly. Then, fifty households, from each were interviewed in Küçükesat and in Çukurambar and the responses were entered in a uniform questionnaire.

In the manual analyzing and interpretation of data, Chi-square test of significance and Kolmogorov - Smirnov two-sample test were used.

RESULTS

In Küçükesat, 67 % of the respondents stated that the pharmacists themselves dispensed their medications in the pharmacy, whereas the ratio was 83 % for Çukurambar ($p > 0.05$).

Respondents' perceptions about pharmacists' personal attention while providing professional service are presented in Table 1.

In Küçükesat 82 % of our respondents stated that their pharmacist exhibited personalized interest while dispensing, the figure was 94 % for Çukurambar. Consumers' perceptions about phar-

Table 1. Pharmacist's Perceived Attitude While Dispensing

Perceived Attitude	Küçükesat		Çukurambar	
	Number	(%)	Number	(%)
Show personalized interest	41	(82)	47	(94)
Show nonpersonalized interest	9	(18)	3	(6)
Total	50	(100)	50	(100)
	$\chi^2 = 2.36$		$p > 0.05$	

macist's professional knowledge are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Consumers' Perceptions Concerning Pharmacist's Professional Knowledge

Pharmacist's Perceived Knowledge	Küçükesat		Çukurambar	
	Number	(%)	Number	(%)
Very knowledgeable	2	(4)	7	(14)
Knowledgeable	30	(60)	35	(70)
No perception	18	(36)	8	(16)
Total	50	(100)	50	(100)

$D = 0.20$ $p > 0.05$

In Küçükesat 60 % of the respondents indicated that they view the pharmacist as professionally knowledgeable and 36 % of them stated that they have no idea about pharmacist's professional knowledge. In Küçükesat 4 % of the respondents pointed out that they view the pharmacist as being very knowledgeable. However, in Çukurambar, 70 % of the respondents indicated that they view the pharmacist as knowledgeable whereas 16 % of them stated that they have no idea whether he / she is knowledgeable or not. In Çukurambar 14 % said that they perceive the pharmacist as very knowledgeable.

In Table 3, how the image of the pharmacist is perceived by the consumers is presented.

Table 3. Consumers' Perceptions Pharmacist's Image

Pharmacist's Perceived Image	Küçükesat		Çukurambar	
	Number	(%)	Number	(%)
Health professional	38	(76)	45	(90)
"Merchant"	12	(24)	5	(10)
Total	50	(100)	50	(100)

$\chi^2 = 2.56$ $p > 0.05$

In Küçükesat 76 %, and in Çukurambar 90 % of the respondents view the pharmacist as a health professional in the first place.

Consumers' expectations concerning the pharmacist's

professional look is such that 68 % of the respondents interviewed in Küçükesat stated that they would like to see their pharmacist in a white uniform whereas this ratio was 60 % for Çukurambar. Interviewees who declared that they would prefer to see their pharmacist in usual dress were 4 % in both quarters. The ratio of the respondents who indicated that pharmacist's dressing would not matter at all was 28 % for Küçükesat and 36 % for Çukurambar. Qualifications that are expected from the pharmacist are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Qualifications Expected From Pharmacists

Qualifications	Küçükesat (%)	Çukurambar (%)
Knowledge	29.84	34.23
Personal attention	29.03	26.13
Friendliness	22.58	23.42
Proper clothing	6.45	12.61
Quality service	4.84	1.80
Honesty	3.23	0.90
Being a health professional in the first place	3.23	0.90
Availability at all time	0.81	---

Respondents were given a list of occupations, professionals that were included in the list were: Barber, market manager, television mechanic, policeman, school teacher, pharmacist, attorney, physician, optometrist and engineer. Respondents were required to rank these professions according to their importance for the community in their opinion. The results were as follows: In both quarters pharmacists were ranked in the third place among the above mentioned professionals. First was the physician and the second was the school teacher, third being the pharmacist, and the policeman was in the fourth place according to the ranking.

DISCUSSION

Consumers' perceptions about the pharmacist are vital for the community pharmacist as he / she is the most counseled health professional on health matters, medicines, etc. after physician. From the scientific lit-

erature, it is evident that the clinical pharmacy philosophy has furnished a new perspective for the profession. Because of this movement, the community began to view the pharmacist in a new way and evaluate his / her functions from a different approach.

In Küçükesat 67 % and in Çukurambar 83 % of the respondents indicated that the pharmacist dispensed their medications.

In a survey done in USA, it is found that delivery of the filled prescription was made by 78 % of the pharmacist, in 22 % of the cases the drug was delivered by the pharmacy personnel¹⁵. In another study done in the same country, 74 % of the consumers indicated that the pharmacist was always available or available most of the time to answer questions regarding medications¹⁶. Thus, people could consult him / her both on non-prescription and prescription medications and health related matters.

In this research, both in Küçükesat and in Çukurambar, more than half of the respondents indicated that they view the pharmacist professionally knowledgeable in his / her practice (Table 2). In Dichter Institute's survey (USA) likewise 65 % of the consumers stated that the pharmacist is an appropriate source of health information¹⁴.

In an interview survey done in UK, 61 % of respondents indicated that they had previously asked for advice about health from a pharmacist and a further 25.5 % said they would consider doing so¹⁷.

Both in Çukurambar and in Küçükesat, respondents indicated that they view the pharmacist generally as a health professional rather than a "merchant" (Table 3). In Küçükesat three-fourths and in Çukurambar nine-tenths of the respondents believed that the pharmacist is a health professional in the first place. In various surveys done abroad people's perceptions concerning pharmacist's image are similar. For example, in a study done in Canada, more than half of the respondents viewed the pharmacist as more of a health professional than a merchant, predominantly because of the educational requirements¹⁸. In another study done in the same country, 80 % of the consumers had either a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in pharmacists¹². Again in USA according to a nationwide gallup poll

in 1987, pharmacists ranked as number one in the eye of the public in terms of "honesty and ethical standards" among professionals¹⁶.

In a survey done in Istanbul, pharmacist is characterized as "an authorized person who sells medicines" by almost 40 % of the consumers, and 12 % of them characterized the pharmacist as a "half physician"¹⁹. Also, eight out of ten people stated that in general they trust in pharmacists. Further more, nine out of ten indicated that pharmacy is a respected profession. Respondents mentioned the following positive characteristics for the pharmacist: Reliable, helpful, knowledgeable, concerned and friendly. In our survey, four-fifths of the respondents in Küçükesat and almost all of the respondents in Çukurambar stated that they view the pharmacists as being concerned while providing professional service (Table 1). The most expected qualifications from the pharmacist are as follows: Knowledge, professional concern, and friendliness (Table 4).

In both quarters, respondents ranked the pharmacy profession in the third place after physician and school teacher out of ten different profession. This result suggests that people assign priority to health and education related issues when evaluating professions. At the same time, in a survey done in USA, results revealed that among eight different professions respondents placed the profession of pharmacy in the fourth place²⁰. In that study pharmacist is ranked after physician, dentist and attorney. Dichter Institute's research also showed that among fifteen different professions pharmacy profession was placed in the fourth place¹⁴.

Although the community pharmacy has both the professional and business characteristics, pharmacists should be alert to consumers' needs and wants as much as other health professionals, because they are at the same time owners and / or managers of pharmacy operations²¹. Therefore, they should realize that satisfying consumer expectations is very important to their success as a professional.

In the light of this survey results and other research findings, it appears that pharmacist's image from community's point of view is extremely significant for the pharmacist in order to attain their goals and to be successful when practising. Consumers view the

pharmacist as a "health professional" and evaluate also his / her functions in this aspect.

Pharmacist-patient communication has an important role when providing and promoting pharmaceutical services to the consumers. Most probably including "a communication module" in to the pharmacy curricula will be very useful for pharmacy students as the community expects this.

The above mentioned training could be supported by continuing education programs which are organized by Chamber of Pharmacists.

In UK, USA and in some other western countries legislation and / or code of ethics oblige the pharmacist to interview the patient or his / her representative to obtain drug-related and patient-related information to determine an appropriate course of action (e.g. timing of dosage schedule and advising patient of possible adverse effects)¹⁰. Also starting in the 1960s, the education of the pharmacist began to shift from an emphasis on the physical and chemical properties of drugs to a patient-focused care (pharmacist-patient communication, quality of pharmaceutical services, adverse drug reactions, etc.). There should be rational changes also in our country for the pharmacists' education. The curricula of pharmacy schools have to be reviewed and renewed. Also Turkish Pharmacists' Association (TEB) should reinforce the pharmacists' responsibility when dispensing medications in the light of GPP (Good Pharmacy Practice).

It is clear that, Chambers of Pharmacists, schools of pharmacy and Ministry of Health should coordinate and cooperate to adapt pharmacy curriculum and legislation to contemporary "professional climate" and community's needs and expectations.

REFERENCES

1. Gibson, M.R., "Pharmacists In Practise", *Remington's Pharmaceutical Sciences*, 17th edition, Easton Pennsylvania, Mack Publishing Co, pp. 27-33, 1985.
2. Knapp, D.E., Knapp, D.A., Edwards, J.D., "The Pharmacist as Perceived by Physicians, Patrons and other Pharmacists", *J. Am. Pharm. Assoc.*, 9(2), 80-84, 1969.
3. Sveska, K.J., "Pharmacist's Liability", *Am. J. Hosp. Pharm.*, 5, 1429-1436, 1993.
4. The American Pharmaceutical Association, "The Right Drug to the Right Patient", *An Apha Teaching Manual For Pharmacists Providing In-Service Training*, Washington, pp. 47-63, 1977.
5. Nahata, M.C., "Advances In Clinical Pharmacy - A New Series", *J. Clin. Pharm. Therap.*, 17, 1-2, 1992.
6. McLeod, D.C., "Clinical Pharmacy: The Past, Present and Future", *Am. J. Hosp. Pharm.*, 33, 29-38, 1976.
7. Cohen, E., "An Outsider's View of Pharmacy", *Contemp. Pharm. Pract.*, 2(1), 2-3, 1979.
8. Nelson, M.K., "Our Guest For Tonight Is... Pharmacists and Public Speaking", *Am. Pharm.*, 33(33), 59-62, 1993.
9. Small, R.E. Moherman, L.J., "Geriatric Education: A Fundamental Requirement for Pharmacy Practice", *Am. Pharm.*, 30(11), 42-44, 1990.
10. Haddad, A.M., "If the public rates the pharmacist as having the highest honesty and ethical standards, why does it happen? What does it mean?", *Pharm. Business*, 1(6), 13-15, 1990. "referred in Molzon, J.A., "What Kinds of Patients Counseling Are Required?", *Am. Pharm.*, 32(3), 50-57, 1992.
11. Gibson, M.R., "Role of The Pharmacist... In Public Health", *J. Am. Pharm. Assoc.*, 6(4), 182-184, 1966.
12. Anon., "What Your Customers Think Of You", *Can Pharm J.*, July, 435-436, 1988.
13. Weber, M.P., Reed, M.T., Kraner, S.E., "Health Promotion and Disease Prevention: The Pharmacist's Role", *Am. Pharm.*, 29(10), 37-39, 1989.
14. The American Pharmaceutical Association, "A Motivational Research Study, Communicating the Value of Comprehensive Pharmaceutical Services to the Consumer", Dichter Institute for Motivational Research, Inc., Washington, D.C., July, 1973.
15. Puckett, F.J., White, S.J., Mossberg, H.E., Matchett, J.A., "Pharmacist / Patient Counseling Practices", *Contemp. Pharm. Pract.*, 1(2), 67-70, 1978.
16. Vanderveen, R.P., Jirak, J.L., "The Pharmacist As A Health Consultant - Ten Years Later", *DICP. Ann. Pharmacother.*, 24, September, 833-836, 1990.
17. Barwani, S., Panton, R., Morley, A., "Survey of Public Opinion About the Community Pharmacist As a Source of Health Advice", *Pharm. J.* October, 10-15, 1987.
18. Stratton, T.P., Fielding, D.W., Hill, D.S., "Attitudes to Community Pharmacy In British Columbia", *Can. Pharm. J.*, 126(8), 406-408, 1993.
19. Makro Research Presentation Co., "How Do You Identify Your Pharmacist?", *Actual Pharm. J.*, 1(3), 8-16, 1994.
20. Smith, H.A., "Pharmacy Patronage", *Principles and Methods of Pharmacy Management*, Philadelphia, Lea & Febiger, pp. 215-229, 1975.
21. Gagon, J.P., "Pharmaceutical Services-Consumer Perceptions", *J. Am. Pharm. Assoc.*, 16(3), 137-162, 1976.