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## Beyond medicines provision: community pharmacists roles in meeting patient needs through value-added pharmacy services

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### Abstract

**Objectives** Pharmacy practice now requires more patient-centred and outcome-oriented approach, hence the need for a more value-based model. In developing countries like Nigeria, out-of-pocket spending for health care is high and patients usually visit the community pharmacy first to attend to their health needs. Since patients need to get value for their money, assessing their perception on services provided and their need for value-added pharmacy services is imperative. Thus, this study aims at assessing the perception of patients on services provided by community pharmacies in Nigeria and to ascertain their needs for value-added pharmacy services.

**Methods** A 15-item questionnaire was administered to randomly sampled respondents who routinely visit their community pharmacy. The questionnaire addressed demographics, satisfaction with community pharmacy practice, accessibility of healthcare professionals and need for value-added pharmacy services. The respondents gave oral informed consent prior to administration of the questionnaires. Descriptive statistics were applied in data analysis.

**Key Findings** A total of 384 questionnaires were distributed, and 300 were duly filled and returned. The survey lasted for 3 months, and the questionnaires were self-completed. All respondents agreed that pharmacy practice is important in healthcare delivery in Nigeria. Seventy-one per cent stated that the community pharmacy was their first port of call for treating minor ailments and seeking advice on medicines and health. Furthermore, 61% indicated that they trust pharmacists more than other health professionals in the area of medicines provision and advice. All respondents agreed that they require provision of more services other than medication dispensing and advice from their pharmacists.

**Conclusions** Results suggest that patients have a positive perception towards community pharmacists as the most accessible and trusted health professionals for minor ailments and medicines provision. However, in addition to medicines provision, these patients require more services from pharmacists that add value in meeting their various health and medicines needs.

**Keywords** community pharmacy; healthcare provision; value-added

### Background

Pharmacy practice has evolved from the traditional role of medicines dispensing to a more patient-centred and outcome-oriented model which involves providing better services for the patient through what is known today as pharmaceutical care. In pharmaceutical care, pharmacists collaborate with the patient and other healthcare professionals to provide optimal care that will improve economic, clinical and humanistic outcomes for the patient.<sup>[1]</sup> This means that pharmacy has gone beyond providing just medicines to providing other services that add value to the patient. These value-added pharmacy services are those quality services that patients receive in addition to the traditional pharmacy services of medicines dispensing and professional consultation that are beneficial to their health and improve pharmaceutical care outcomes. These services such as medication therapy management, immunisation services, lifestyle management, disease screening and management programs, amongst others, offer an opportunity to assess the overall health status of the patient and have been linked to increased pharmaceutical care outcomes including lower healthcare costs and improved clinical and humanistic outcomes.<sup>[2,3]</sup>

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By providing these services that add value to patients, pharmacy practice can go beyond medicines provision and contribute more in improving treatment outcomes and patient satisfaction. This is more important in settings like Nigeria where majority of patients pay out of pocket for their medicine needs and thus need to have a sense of having received value for their money. In Nigeria, people pay more than the international reference prices for medicines in both public and private healthcare facilities; medicines have been adjudged to be too expensive for 90.2% of Nigerians and most Nigerians (94.5%) pay out of pocket for their health expenditure.<sup>[4]</sup> Furthermore, majority of Nigerians access medicines from private facilities<sup>[5,6]</sup> such as community pharmacies.

There is a paucity of literature in the area of value-added pharmacy services in Nigeria. Hence, it may be imperative to assess the perception of patients on services provided by community pharmacies in Nigeria and their need for value-added services. Results from this study will help to fill this critical gap and provide directions for further research. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to assess the perception of patients on services provided by community pharmacies in Nigeria and to ascertain the needs of patients for value-added services in community pharmacy practice.

## Methods

The study was set in a community pharmacy in Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria. Questionnaires were administered to 384 randomly sampled respondents who met the inclusion criteria of being over 18 years of age and routinely visit the community pharmacy to fulfil their medicines needs including purchasing over-the-counter medicines, refilling prescription medicines and seeking medicines advice. Five community pharmacists and five walk-in customers were used to conduct face and content validity on the instrument prior to the study. Some of the ambiguity identified by the face and content validity testing were addressed by reconstructing the questions to provide more clarity to respondents. Respondents received a 15-item self-administered questionnaire addressing demographics, satisfaction with community pharmacy practice, accessibility of healthcare professionals and need for value-added pharmacy services. The respondents gave oral informed consent prior to administration of the questionnaires. Respondents agreed to fill the questionnaires while their medications are being packaged and then returned the questionnaire to the pharmacist before leaving with their medications. Descriptive statistics were applied in data analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 21; Armonk, NY, USA).

## Results

Out of the 384 questionnaires distributed, 300 were duly filled by the respondents and returned to the pharmacist, giving a response rate of 78%. The survey lasted for 3 months, and the questionnaires were self-completed. All the respondents agreed that pharmacy practice is important in healthcare delivery in Nigeria; however, 43% of the respondents were

not satisfied with the current state of pharmacy practice in Nigeria. Seventy-one per cent (71%) of the respondents stated that the community pharmacy was their first port of call for treating minor ailments and seeking advice on medicines and health. Furthermore, 61% of respondents indicated that they trust their pharmacists more than other health professionals in the area of medicines provision and advice. Seventy-one per cent (71%) also stated that their pharmacists are more accessible and supportive in provision of medicines and care. In the area of discussing all aspects of their medications, 86% of the respondents stated that they are more confident when they are doing this with their pharmacist than with other healthcare professionals.

All the respondents agreed that they require provision of more services other than dispensing medications and receiving medicines advice and support from their pharmacist. Respondents stated that there needs to be provision of services such as emergency services, lifestyle management, cholesterol monitoring, homecare services, sexual and reproductive health services, disease screening and receiving reminders for medicines use.

## Discussion

Results show that pharmacists are among the most accessible and trusted health professionals, thus are well positioned to, beyond medicines provision, provide more services to patients to meet their health and medicine need. The results also show that patients require value-added services from pharmacists. The findings from this compare positively to other studies that have shown pharmacists as the most accessible healthcare professionals<sup>[7]</sup> as well as studies that have shown patient needs for value-added pharmacy services.<sup>[8]</sup>

Hence, pharmacists need to become more proactive in providing value-added services so as to improve pharmaceutical care outcomes for patients and ensure that they get value for their out-of-pocket expenditure for medicines and health services especially in resource-limited settings like Nigeria. In this setting, where human resources for health continue to dwindle, pharmacists, through the provision of these services, can help to fill the gap needed to expand patient access to health care. This is more so important given various studies reporting that pharmacists care adds no value to or can even have a negative impact on patient outcomes.<sup>[9,10]</sup> Furthermore, the advent and continuous evolution of information and communication technologies means that patients now have more access to certain information, which, prior to now, were privy to pharmacists.

Thus, findings from this study add to the growing body of evidence of the importance of pharmacists in rendering services that add value to patients, thus expanding access to health care and universal health coverage. This study also helps to reduce the paucity of evidence in this area especially for resource-limited settings and reinforces the need for community pharmacy practice to move to a more value-based model and enhance its role in delivery of primary care in these settings.

## Conclusion

Results suggest that patients have a positive perception towards community pharmacists as the most accessible and trusted health professionals for minor ailments and medicines provision. However, in addition to medicines provision, these patients require more services from pharmacists that add value in meeting their various health and medicines needs. Thus, community pharmacists need to expand their role beyond medicines provision to providing more services that add value to the patient and expand access to primary care services.

## Declarations

### Conflict of interest

The Author(s) declare(s) that they have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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### Authors' contributions

OAC conceptualized and designed the study and also oversaw the data collection and data cleaning. OAC also analyzed the data and drafted the entire manuscript.

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