

The Community Pharmacist Caught between Ethics, Pharmacy Management and Patient needs Assessment of the Main Stress Factors for the Pharmacists in the Community Pharmacy in Romania

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study aims to evaluate the main stress factors for the pharmacist in the community pharmacy in Romania and how the pharmacists manage the tensions generated by professional ethics, patient attitudes and pharmacy management, and the degree of professional satisfaction of pharmacists. **Materials and Methods:** The study was conducted over 7 months. The population surveyed consisted of 376 pharmacists working in the community pharmacy. They completed a questionnaire consisting of six representative sections for each category of factors considered: demographic data, pharmacy satisfaction, stress factors determined by patient attitudes, stress factors determined by pharmacy management, ethical stress factors and other factors, items designed to reveal the physical / psychological impairment of community pharmacists. **Results and Discussion:** As a result of the responses received, community pharmacists are satisfied with their profession, but the problems faced by the current pharmaceutical market, but also patients' attitudes, the pressure of pharmacy management and the responsibility of the profession generates harm to their health and negatively influence the activity in the community pharmacy. **Conclusion:** It is highlighted that the community pharmacist's satisfaction with this profession is diminishing and it is necessary that further analysis be carried out to remove or diminish the influence of these factors.

Key words: Community pharmacists, Stress factors, Pharmacy management, Current pharmaceutical market, Ethics.

INTRODUCTION

As stress is a major factor influencing the health, the mental state and behavior of individuals and prolonged exposure to stress factors leads to long-term psychosocial deterioration and may influence the onset or course of chronic illness, but also the increasing number of studies conducted on occupational diseases it is interesting to assess the stress factors for the community pharmacists.¹ In a profession involving the responsibility of a population's health, the community pharmacist must have skills and techniques designed to cope with the

pressure that may arise both from the management of the pharmacy, patient needs and professional ethics. However, the satisfaction of pharmacists with their profession affects not only the employees and the employers, but also the patients who receive the services of the pharmacists.²⁻³ In Romania, the profession of community pharmacist has undergone numerous transformations in recent years, taking into account the spectacular growth in the number of pharmacies that have been set up, the unrealistic marketing of medicines

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and drug supplements, and the absence of medicines in the pharmaceutical market.⁴ The pharmacist is now seen by the patient, doctors and employers as a salesman dressed in white. The community pharmacist gets caught up between professional ethics, managerial pressures on financial benefits, the poor organization and functioning of an entire health system, the bureaucracy of the health insurance house and the needs of patients, trying to quietly manage conflicts and frustrations in trying to satisfy all the parties involved.⁵⁻⁶ One of the most important current issues in the pharmaceutical market is the lack of medicines.⁴ The frustration of not being able to meet the patient's need and sometimes the inappropriate attitude of sick, tired and elderly patients is a major stressor for the community pharmacist.⁶⁻⁷

At the same time, in recent years, the Romanian pharmaceutical market faces the lack of specialists who decide to emigrate to other countries in Europe, motivated by better working conditions or competitive wage packages.⁸ Thus, in the community pharmacy the number of specialists is further diminishing causes community pharmacists to spend additional time at work or to carry out activities that are not part of their profession. The community pharmacist becomes exhausted both physically and mentally, which can result in serious human errors that may affect the health of the population.

Also, more and more pharmacies abolish the activity of the preparing recipe in the community pharmacy, because this activity does not create the desired profit. The low number of this kind of pharmacies causes pharmacists that work in such a location to be overtaken by the number of recipes they have to carry out, which may result in an unstable or ineffective medicine. This represents another reason for stress due to the pharmacist's inability to work in optimal parameters.

Another major stress factor for the pharmacist in the community pharmacy is the management of the pharmacy, which, under the desire to obtain the desired financial benefits, does not take into account the actual needs of the patients, nor does it allow the pharmacist to practice according to professional ethics.⁵

Thus, the pharmacist must find a way to satisfy primarily the needs of the patient, but also the requirements of the management, while respecting the rules of professional ethics, which can ultimately determine the physical and emotional collapse of the community pharmacist.

This study aims to analyze qualitatively and quantitatively the main stress factors for the community pharmacists and also the way that they affect their health, mental state, occupational and social life.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted over 7 months (September 2016-April 2017) to analyze the main stress factors faced by community pharmacists.

The study was conducted in Bucharest and surrounding cities/towns, both rural and urban and the study population included 376 community pharmacists considered eligible under the following inclusion criteria: pharmacists working in the community pharmacy for at least 2 years, pharmacists who wanted to participate in the study, pharmacists working in Bucharest and nearby cities. The tool used to conduct this study was the questionnaire. Data was collected through Google Docs.

376 community pharmacists completed the questionnaires. Variables such as age and experience have been taken into account.

With the help of the surgeons, experts in statistical analysis and data processing, the results obtained were quantified in Microsoft Excel to get the complete analysis. The questionnaires were divided into several sections as follows:

- I. The first part includes demographic data, such as gender, age, level of experience, the environment in which the pharmacists work (urban / rural)
- II. Items to evaluate the satisfaction of pharmacists about their profession
- III. Items regarding the stress factors generated by patients attitude
- IV. The fourth part contains items to assess the stress factors generated by pharmacy management
- V. The fifth part includes stress factors generated by professional ethics and other factors
- VI. The last part contains items intended to evaluate the physical / psychic state of community pharmacists

RESULTS

A total of 376 community pharmacists took part in this study.

The pharmacists who responded to the questionnaire were predominantly women (81.92%) and were aged between 25-35 years (47.34%). Most of the pharmacists surveyed had an experience of 1-5 years (46.84%) and 91.7% of them worked in the urban area (Table 1).

For a more accurate assessment of the major stressors for the community pharmacists, an analysis of the degree of satisfaction with their profession was carried out.

Most pharmacists surveyed are satisfied when they are called community pharmacists (97.4%), while a very

Table 1: Demographic data on the population surveyed.

| Items taken into account | Answers |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| Sex | |
| Female | 81.92 % (n=308) |
| Male | 18.08 % (n=68) |
| Age | |
| 25-35 years | 47.34% (n=178) |
| 35-45 years | 27.39% (n=103) |
| ≥ 45 years | 25.27% (n=95) |
| Level of experience | |
| 1-5 years | 46.80 % (n=176) |
| 5-10 years | 26.86% (n=101) |
| >10 years | 26.34 % (n=99) |
| Place where they work | |
| Urban | 91.49% (n=344) |
| Rural | 8.51% (n=32) |

Table 2: Items to evaluate the satisfaction of pharmacists about their profession.

| Question | Answer | | |
|---|-----------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Are you satisfied when you are called a community pharmacist? | YES | NO | |
| | 97.4% | 2.6% | |
| How satisfied are you about your profession (moral and financial satisfaction)? | Satisfied | Very little satisfied | Not satisfied |
| | 58.03% | 28.26% | 13.71% |
| Do you think you spend more time at the pharmacy than for other personal life activities? | YES | NO | |
| | 87.62 % | 12.38% | |

small number does not have this satisfaction. Regarding the degree of moral and financial satisfaction brought by the profession of community pharmacist, only 58.03% of the pharmacists analyzed are satisfied, 28.26% very little satisfied, while a significant percentage of 13.71 % are not at all satisfied. A significant percent (87.62%) of the surveyed pharmacists consider spending more time at work than with their family or for other personal life activities (Table 2).

Quantitative analysis of stress factors generated by patients' attitudes identified that for 78.89% of surveyed pharmacists, the patients unable to acquire their drugs exert pressure to acquire the necessary medicine. Pharmacists surveyed say that the inability to help a patient affects them emotionally (71.34%), while only 1.78% are not affected at all. Also, community pharmacists consider that the inability to help a patient to obtain their prescribed medication is a major stressor for 94.17% of them. The study population states that patients

frequently require prescription medications (68.12%), and 78.14% of them experience violent reactions from patients when refusing to release these medications. Also, 96.21% of surveyed pharmacists argue that patients' violent attitudes are one of the most important factors that generate emotional tension (Table 3).

Regarding pharmacy management, 67.89% of the questioned community pharmacists consider the managers' attitude towards pharmacist profession as inappropriate. A significant number of 87.31% of community pharmacists argue that management pressures in the form of campaigns to promote various medicinal products influence their recommendation to the patient. Moreover, 76.24% of the study population reported having to spend 1-2 h more in the pharmacy every day due to lack of staff and maladministration. Also for 89.23% of the community pharmacists, the financial pressures coming from the managers lead to an emotional and physical overload, which greatly affects their mental health status (Table 4).

For 96.12% of the interviewed persons, professional ethics is an important factor in the development of the community pharmacist profession, but only 54.13% of them consider that they really fulfill the role of a health specialist and that they can apply their knowledge obtained during faculty. Only 57.48% of the surveyed pharmacists consider the patient's anamnesis to be complete and rigorous, while a significant percentage of 42.52% said the contrary. The evaluated pharmacists (76.87%) consider that they provide sufficient information to the patient regarding the medications they use. The main reason why they are unable to provide sufficient information to patients is lack of time for 79.82%, while for 14.76% is fatigue and negligence, and for 5.42 % the reason is not known. In addition to this, 98.7% of community pharmacists believe they are frequently subjected to errors and the primary cause is the psychological tension (32.63 %), fatigue (23.12%), managerial pressures (19.82%), patient's attitude (18.86%) and for 5.57% of them lack of information. The questioned pharmacists (12.54%) work in a community pharmacy that prepare recipe and 86.41% of this category consider that in some situations they do not have enough time to prepare the recipe due to some factors that do not regard their profession. Although a significant number of pharmacists surveyed declare that professional ethics is a very important item, 83.65% said there are many situations when ethics is not taken into account and this affects them emotionally.

Regarding other factors affecting the community pharmacists, for 27.89% the malfunctioning of the electronic platforms causes their psychological impairment. Also,

Table 3: Items regarding the stress factors generated by patients attitude.

| Question | Answer | | | |
|--|-----------|--------|----------|------------|
| Do patients unable to find their medicine exert pressure on you? | YES | | NO | |
| | 78.89 % | | 21.11% | |
| How much does emotionally affects you the inability to help a patient? | Very much | Much | Little | Not at all |
| | 71.34% | 22.12% | 4.76% | 1.78% |
| Do you consider that the inability to help a patient obtain their prescribed medication is a major stressor for you? | YES | | NO | |
| | 94.17% | | 5.83% | |
| How often do patients require prescription drugs to be released? | Never | Rare | Frequent | Very often |
| | 8.21 % | 17.63% | 68.12% | 6.04 % |
| Did you experience violent reactions from patients when you refused to release medications that need medical prescription? | YES | | NO | |
| | 78.14% | | 21.86% | |
| Do you think that violent attitude of patients is an important factor that generates emotional tension? | YES | | NO | |
| | 96.21% | | 3.79% | |

Table 4: Items to assess the stress factors generated by pharmacy management.

| Question | Answer | | |
|--|--------|--------|-------|
| Do you consider the managers' attitude towards your profession is inappropriate? | YES | NO | |
| | 67.89% | 32.11% | |
| Do you consider that managerial pressures in the form of campaigns for the promotion of various medicinal products will influence the recommendations made to the patient? | YES | NO | |
| | 87.31% | 12.69% | |
| How many extra hours do you have to spend on average in the pharmacy over a day? | >1 h | 1-2 h | >2 h |
| | 17.44% | 76.24% | 6.32% |
| Do you think that financial pressures coming from the managers cause an emotional and physical overload that will greatly affect your mental health? | YES | NO | |
| | 89.23% | 10.77% | |

campaigns to promote certain medications developed by medical representatives generates for 25.84% of them mental tension (Table 5).

Pharmacists' response to items to show the degree of physical and psychosocial impairment revealed that 86.97% of community pharmacists believe that time spent in the pharmacy affects their health. They also said they had to consult their GP for issues related to the time spent in the pharmacy frequently (62.67%). Among the medical specialties that they need to address for health problems related to the profession of pharmacist are psychiatry (48.21%), orthopedics and rheumatology (16.52%), internal medicine (23.54), surgical specialties (11.73%).

Another item evaluated was the time spent out of the pharmacy, and 71.34% of pharmacists claim that they spend very little time outside the pharmacy, fact that affects their psychosocial life significantly for 81.69% of them (Table 6).

For 34.85% of the surveyed pharmacists the main stress factor is the attitude of the patient, 37.82 the abusive management of the pharmacy, 27.33% professional ethics.

DISCUSSION

The community pharmacists evaluated are women most of them, aged between 25-35 years old, with a community pharmacy experience of 1 - 5 years, and they are predominantly active in the urban environment. Assessing the degree of satisfaction with the profession of pharmacist it was shown that this profession brings the financial and psychological satisfaction expected by the study population for more than half, but significant percentages are disappointed with these issues. The satisfaction of being a community pharmacist is absent in significant cases, a fact that is worrying to ensure the continuity of this profession. The lack of this satisfaction can either determine the professional reorientation of the young graduates of the pharmacy faculties or even the drop in the number of students willing to pursue this profession. A worrying percentage states that time spent on personal activities is neglected because of the time spent in the community pharmacy, which can lead to exaggerated fatigue and intellectual consumption among pharmacists and it also can reduce the efficiency

Table 5: Stress factors generated by professional ethics and other factors.

| Question | Answer | | |
|---|--------------|------------------------|----------------|
| | YES | NO | |
| Do you consider that professional ethics is an important factor in the development of the community pharmacist profession? | YES | NO | |
| | 96.12% | 3.88% | |
| Do you consider that you truly fulfill the role of a health specialist and that you can apply your faculty knowledge? | YES | NO | |
| | 54.13% | 45.87% | |
| Do you think the patient's anamnesis is complete and rigorous? | YES | NO | |
| | 57.48% | 42.52% | |
| Do you consider that you provide sufficient information to the patient regarding the medication they use? | YES | NO | |
| | 76.87% | 23.13% | |
| What do you consider to be the main cause for which you find yourself unable to provide sufficient information to patients? | Lack of time | Negligence and fatigue | Unknown reason |
| | 79.82% | 14.76% | 5.42% |
| Do you consider that you are frequently subjected to errors? | YES | NO | |
| | 98.71% | 1.29% | |
| Do you work in a community pharmacy where you can prepare recipe? | YES | NO | |
| | 12.54% | 87.46% | |
| Do you think that there are situations when you do not have enough time to prepare the recipe due to some factors that do not regard your profession? | YES | NO | |
| | 86.41% | 13.59% | |
| Do you think that situations in which professional ethics is not taken into account affects you emotionally? | YES | NO | |
| | 83.65% | 16.35% | |
| Do you consider that the malfunctioning of electronic platforms causes your psychological impairment? | YES | NO | |
| | 27.89% | 72.11% | |
| Do you think that campaigns to promote certain medications by medical representatives generate psychological tension? | YES | NO | |
| | 25.84 % | 74.16% | |

Table 6: Assessing the degree of physical and psychosocial impairment.

| Question | Answer | | |
|---|--------|--------|----------|
| | YES | NO | |
| Do you think the time spent in the pharmacy will affect your health? | YES | NO | |
| | 86.97% | 13.03% | |
| How often have you had to consult your doctor about a health problem generated by the time spent in the pharmacy? | Never | Rare | Frequent |
| | 7.66% | 29.67% | 62.67% |
| Do you consider that time spent outside the pharmacy is insufficient to carry out social activities? | YES | NO | |
| | 71.34% | 28.66% | |
| Do you consider that the aspect previously assessed will significantly affect your psychosocial life? | YES | NO | |
| | 81.69% | 18.31 | |

of their work in the community pharmacy, which brings a significant impact on the health of the population. Also, assessment of items regarding patient attitude has demonstrated that the community pharmacist is emotionally affected by the aggressive and violent attitude of patients who either for good reason or because of their age, disease, lack of education, exert pressure on pharmacists to release or purchase certain medicines. Thus the community pharmacist is subjected to significant psychiatric tension that can degrade both the relationship with the patient but also his emotional state. The inability

to help the patient in difficulty due to the current crisis faced by the Romanian pharmaceutical market has proven to be a major stressor for the community pharmacist.

Between patient needs and demands and professional ethics, the pharmacist is subject to another tension factor - the attitude of the pharmacy managers, in many instances inappropriate. Obtaining financial benefits leads pharmacies managers to subject the community pharmacist to pressure to release certain products, which can cause both the lack of satisfaction of the

patient's needs and the degradation of the community pharmacist who loses the role of a health specialist and becomes a trader. The study showed that the lack of staff in the community pharmacy causes pharmacists to spend extra time working, so the community pharmacist becomes exhausted both physically and mentally, which can result in serious human errors that can affect the health of the population. For most of the evaluated pharmacists, managers' attitude is a major stress factor. Since most of the evaluated pharmacists consider professional ethics to be a very important aspect of their activity, the situations they face can cause them to leave behind this aspect, which generates problems both in meeting the needs of patients and in the mental health of pharmacists, who have said in a significant percentage that this affects their mental condition. Taking into account that a generous percentage of the surveyed population does not consider that the pharmacist can apply his / her knowledge acquired during the faculty, the lack of motivation for the pharmacists is obvious, which is an worrying aspect for ensuring the pharmaceutical assistance for the population at the highest standards. Doing an incomplete anamnesis can result in the patient's incorrect diagnosis and the recommendation of a medication that does not solve the patient's problem. A significant percentage of questioned pharmacists state that this is happening frequently due to lack of time. At the same time, this aspect also generates insufficient information on the medication used by the patient, leading to the incorrect or desirable use of medicinal products, which significantly affects the state of health of the population. This is particularly worrying about the mental health of the community pharmacist who, under the influence of intellectual fatigue, does not have the capacity to provide the best indications for patient. A percentage of 98.71% of community pharmacists consider that they are frequently subjected to errors and their main cause is psychological tension (32.63%), fatigue (23.12%), managerial pressures (19.82%), patient attitude (18.86%) and for 5.57% lack of information (Figure 1).

Also, more and more pharmacies quit on preparing recipe, not achieving the desired profit. A significantly reduced percentage of the population of this study work in such a pharmacy. The low number of pharmacies with their own laboratory causes pharmacists that work in such a location to be overtaken by the number of recipes they have to carry out, which may be the consequence of an unstable or ineffective medicine. This creates another reason for stress due to the pharmacist's inability to work in optimal parameters.

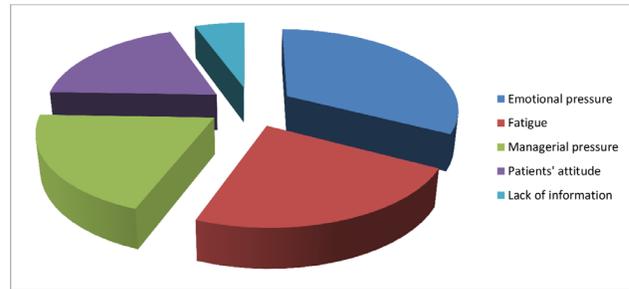


Figure 1: The main reasons that can cause errors in the community pharmacy.

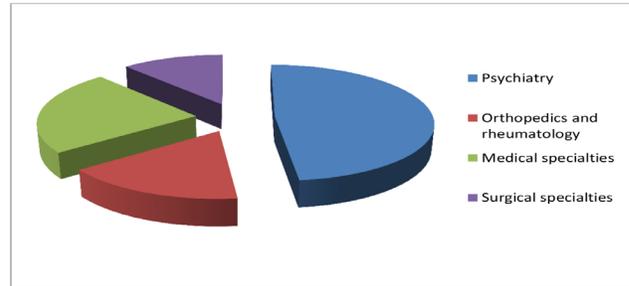


Figure 2: The main medical specialties that the community pharmacists need to address.

The malfunction of electronic platforms determines the psychological tension of both patients and pharmacists who becomes unable to solve the needs of patients in a timely manner. Also, campaigns to promote certain medications developed by medical representatives generate stress among pharmacists.

The evaluation of community pharmacists has shown that they do not spend enough free time to carry out their personal and social activities, fact that can also affect their private life. Thus, they become physically and mentally overwhelmed by the exaggerated time spent in pharmacy, which can cause certain pathologies among community pharmacists and issues in their personal life. Among the medical specialties that need to address for health problems related to the profession of pharmacist are psychiatry (48.21%), orthopedics and rheumatology (16.52%), medical specialties (23.54), surgical specialties (11.73%) (Figure 2).

Also, doctors, authors of this article, confirm, following a statistical analysis of the last year's observation sheets, that one in 7 patients with advanced varicose disease is a pharmacist.

CONCLUSION

This study presents some of the factors that cause stress among community pharmacists, but also the way they

affect their physical and mental state, professional and social life.

The article highlights that the community pharmacist's satisfaction with this profession is diminishing. The main factor of stress for the community pharmacist is pharmacist management, while pressure from patients, the responsibility of this profession generates numerous reasons for impairment of physical and mental health among pharmacists.

In conclusion, a further analysis should be done to remove or diminish the influence of these factors and to develop this profession in the right direction to provide a suitable pharmaceutical care.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

SUMMARY

The community pharmacist's satisfaction with this profession is diminishing. The main factor of stress for

the community pharmacist is pharmacist management, while pressure from patients, the responsibility of this profession generates numerous reasons for impairment of physical and mental health among pharmacists.

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