

Public Perception of Pharmacists in Delta State

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ABSTRACT

Background: Pharmacists are rated as one of the top three professionals who serve the society but it is not clear whether the public fully appreciates what Pharmacists can do. Public perceptions and expectations of Pharmacists in Delta state.

Method: Eighteen local government areas in Delta state were randomly selected as study sites. Adults, 18 years of age and over who were able to communicate in English were randomly approached and anonymously interviewed using a 34-item pretested questionnaire.

Result: 7200 questionnaires were administered and 6586 were completely filled and returned, giving a response rate of 91.4%. A majority of the respondents were female (3561, 54.1%). Most of the respondents indicated that Pharmacists are Health care professionals (5356, 84.3%). Although a large number of the respondents (6551, 99.5%) have heard of the term Pharmacist, (4249, 64.5%) usually have difficulty knowing which person behind the counter is the Pharmacist.

Conclusion: This study adds to our understanding of Public perception of Pharmacists and the potential for an increased scope of practice. Respondents in this study suggested that the public has a good

understanding of Pharmacists in Delta state, but there are still some variations, so it is up to the individual Pharmacist to educate consumers/patients one at a time on a daily basis about their responsibilities.

Key words: Pharmacist, Perception, Public, Responsibility

INTRODUCTION

Pharmacy as a profession goes beyond filling prescription; it also promotes health awareness and contributes to the well-being of the public/community at large. It is a health profession that links the health sciences with the clinical sciences. It is also charged with ensuring the safe and effective use of pharmaceutical drugs in a patient centered manner.¹ Pharmacist's professional standards are internationally acknowledged to protect the well-being of patients through ensuring good quality, rational use and proven efficacy of medicine.²

The recognition of the expertise of Pharmacists have been welcomed by many in the Pharmacy profession as it tends to move from product-oriented roles towards patient-oriented roles. However it is not clear how the general public perceives this change.³ While it is a good thing that the pharmacy profession appears to be trustworthy and held in high esteem, it is not clear whether the public fully

appreciate what the pharmacists can do. The purpose of the study is to understand whether the changes occurring in the profession of pharmacy are being recognized, and this can be achieved by examining the perception of those the profession serves - the public.

METHODS

Study design

A cross-sectional study was carried out involving people from 18 randomly selected Local Government Areas in Delta state. These Local Government Areas are in the urban, sub-urban and rural areas of the state and their LGA headquarters was used for the study. The survey was carried out using a well structured 34-item questionnaire which was pre-tested for the purpose of the work. The questionnaire consisted of closed- and open-ended questions covering information about socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, and specific questions on the public perception of Pharmacists in Delta state. To minimize bias, chance random sampling was done and the participants were the general public 18 years and above. The questionnaires were self-administered to respondents in offices, schools, hospitals, markets churches, motor parks and even in their homes. In cases where the respondents could neither read nor

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write the questions and their options were read out and the options ticked as the respondent indicated. Appropriate authorization to carry out this research was sought out for in places where authorization was required. Maximum effort was made to maintain confidentiality of information by omitting names of the respondents and making sure they were aware that no information they provided could be linked to them by anybody, including the researcher. The sample size was calculated for each LGA and a sample size of 400 was obtained. Consequently, a total sample size of 7200 was used for the study. The estimated minimum sample size was calculated using the Fischer's statistical formula for calculating sample size.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + (e)^2}$$

Where n = sample size

N = population size

e = level of precision or margin of error (0.05)

Data collection

Members of the public who were 18 years and above of age and able to communicate in English were randomly approached, provided with the study objectives, assured about data confidentiality and anonymity, and requested to participate. People who offered oral consent because they could neither read nor write were anonymously interviewed. Individuals who did not offer oral consent or were not able to answer the survey questions due to language barriers were excluded. Data collection took place over a 10-week period during normal daytime business hours within July 2013 to September 2013. A sample of 7200 people (400 people per study site) was selected.

Data analysis

Completed questionnaires were carefully sorted by coding them into Statistical Package for Social Sciences

version 20.0 for windows (IBM SPSS Statistics 20) database and reviewed for accuracy then analyzed using descriptive analysis (frequencies, percentages and mean) based on the total number of respondents. Five-point Likert scale responses were collapsed into three general categories (Agree, Undecided, Disagree).

RESULTS

The response rate was 91.4% where 7200 questionnaire was administered and 6586 was completely filled and returned.

According to Table 1, socio-demographic data of the respondents revealed that the majority of respondents were young

adults and adults, (63.4%). Most of the respondents were from age groups 23-27 years, followed by 28-32 and 18-22 years who contributed to 64.4% of the total respondents while the elderly 54-58 and >59 were only 3.7% of them. Male respondents were 45.9% while female respondents were 54.1%. Participants who were single were greater in number 52.5%. Majority of the respondents has tertiary education, (74.3%). Civil servants made majority of the respondents. Additionally, urban residents were more, (56.2%).

Table 1: Socio-demographic information of respondents

Characteristics of Respondents	Frequency (%)
Age	
18-22	1118 (17%)
23-27	1878 (28%)
28-32	1179 (17.9%)
33-37	794 (12.1%)
38-42	670 (10.2%)
43-48	526 (8.0%)
49-53	179 (2.7%)
54-58	86 (1.3%)
>59	156 (2.4%)
Gender	
Male	3025 (54.9%)
Female	3561 (54.1%)
Marital status	
Single	3458 (52.5%)
Married	2874 (43.6%)
Divorced	88 (1.3%)
Widow/widower	105 (1.6%)
Separated	61 (0.9%)
Level of Education	
Primary	349 (5.3%)
Secondary	1293 (19.6%)
Tertiary	4896 (74.3%)
None	48 (0.7%)
Occupation	
Business tycoon	1627 (24.7%)
Student	1644 (25.0%)
Doctor	305 (4.6%)
Nurse	279 (4.2%)
Civil servants	1723 (26.2%)
Others	1008 (15.3%)
Residence	
Urban	3700 (56.2%)
Sub-urban	1924 (29.2%)
Rural	962 (14.6%)

Level of awareness

When respondents were asked if they have heard of the term "Pharmacist", majority of the respondents said yes (99.5%), while a few others said no (0.5%).

Majority of the respondents indicated that they heard the word Pharmacist from the hospital (38.0%), followed by school (36.6%), family (18.5%), and community (6.9%).

72.5% of the respondents believed that Pharmacists are drug Expert, 17.2% said the Pharmacists are people who sell drugs, 7.8% indicated that they are chemist and 2.5% said they are doctors.

When asked where the Pharmacists work, majority of the respondents (49.9%), reported that the Pharmacist work in the hospital, 7.4% said community, and 7.1% industries.

35.6% reported that pharmacist work in all three places; hospital community and industries.

When asked whether it was important to see the Pharmacist before they get their medication, majority of respondents (63.1%) said it was important while (36.9%) felt it was not important to see the Pharmacist before getting their medication.

Table 2: Participants response on their level of awareness towards the Pharmacist

Question:	Frequency
Have you heard of the term Pharmacist?	
Yes	6551 (99.5%)
No	35 (0.5%)
Where did you hear it from?	
Family	1220 (18.5%)
Hospital	2504 (38.0%)
School	2408 (36.6%)
Community	454 (6.9%)
Who is a Pharmacist?	
A drug expert	4774 (72.5%)
A person who sells drugs	1133 (17.2%)
Doctor	164 (2.5%)
Chemist	515 (7.8%)
Where does the Pharmacist work?	
Hospital	3285 (49.9%)
Industry	469 (7.1%)
Community	490 (7.4%)
All of the above	2342 (35.6%)
I' don't have to see a Pharmacist face-to-face before I get my medicine	
True	2428 (36.9%)
False	4154 (63.1%)

Publics' view of Pharmacist

Fifteen items were used to assess respondents' perception of Pharmacists (Table 2). There was a high level of agreement that the Pharmacists are Knowledgeable in drugs (95.6%), agreed or strongly agreed. The public in this study also

agreed or strongly (83.1%) that Pharmacists are health care professionals like Doctors and Nurses. 44.1% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed and 16.5% was indecisive while 39.4% agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, counter is a Pharmacist and 74.1% agreed or strongly agreed that

Pharmacists are friendly and have good relationship with patients. 44.1% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed and 16.5% was indecisive while 39.4% agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, Patient care is an activity of the Pharmacist.

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Table 3: Public's view of Pharmacists

Item	Strongly agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Undecided n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Strongly disagree n (%)
I usually have difficulty knowing which person behind the counter is the pharmacist	1560 (23.7%)	2689 (40.8%)	439 (6.7%)	1414 (21.5%)	484 (7.3%)
If the Pharmacist is busy I'd rather talk to the sales persons about my health situation than wait	469 (7.1%)	1608 (24.4%)	454 (6.9%)	2537 (38.5%)	1518 (23.0%)
Pharmacists are knowledgeable and drug experts	3918 (59.5%)	2376 (36.1%)	116 (1.8%)	148 (2.2%)	28 (0.4%)
Pharmacist keep record of patients medication	1329 (20.2%)	1752 (26.6%)	1168 (17.7%)	1834 (27.8%)	503 (7.6%)
Pharmacists are health care professionals just like Doctors and Nurses	2215 (33.6%)	3141 (47.4%)	561 (8.5%)	601 (9.1%)	68 (1.0%)
The Pharmacist cannot give me reliable advice about my food	621 (9.4%)	1578 (24.0%)	1147 (17.4%)	2348 (35.7%)	892 (13.5%)
The Pharmacist cannot help me with my health problem	427 (6.5%)	1030 (15.6%)	612 (9.3%)	3249 (49.3%)	1268 (19.3%)
The Pharmacist talk about prescription and provide medication advice on request	2378 (36.1%)	2873 (43.6%)	716 (10.9%)	469 (7.1%)	150 (2.3%)
The Pharmacist is only useful where medicines are concerned	966 (14.7%)	2904 (44.1%)	978 (14.8%)	1351 (20.5%)	387 (5.9%)
Patient care is an activity of the Pharmacist	937 (14.2%)	1658 (25.2%)	1087 (16.5%)	2145 (32.6%)	759 (11.5%)
I don't really know what Pharmacists do beyond counting pills	656 (10%)	1703 (25.9%)	1403 (21.3%)	2150 (32.6%)	674 (10.2%)
Pharmacists are just business people who sell drugs in Pharmacies	626 (9.5%)	1125 (17.1%)	608 (9.2%)	2936 (44.6%)	1291 (19.6%)
Pharmacists are friendly and have good relationship with patients	1758 (26.7%)	3119 (47.4%)	785 (11.9%)	709 (10.8%)	215 (3.3%)
I can talk freely about my health related problems with my Pharmacist	1619 (24.6%)	3153 (47.9%)	796 (12.1%)	759 (11.5%)	259 (3.9%)
I have total faith in the competence and drug related knowledge of my Pharmacist	1893 (28.7%)	2898 (44.0%)	769 (11.7%)	638 (9.7%)	388 (5.9%)

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Who the public rely on for information

A majority of the respondents believed that Doctors (3637, 52.2%) were responsible for their general health and well being.

Table 4: Who the public rely on for information

	Medical scientist	Lab	Nurses	Doctors	Pharmacists	Sales boy/girl
Information on non- prescription drug	777 (11.8%)		433 (6.6%)	2431 (36.9%)	1910 (29.0%)	1035 (15.7%)
Cost of prescription drugs	179 (2.7%)		399 (6.1%)	954 (14.5%)	3359 (51.0%)	1695 (25.7%)
Advice on how to take medication	130 (2.0%)		459 (7.0%)	2948 (44.8%)	2899 (44.0%)	150 (2.3%)
Information on herbal products	855 (13.0%)		233 (3.5%)	1880 (28.5%)	3095 (47.0%)	523 (7.9%)
Information on side effects and drug interactions	485 (7.4%)		392 (6.0%)	2712 (41.2%)	2867 (43.5%)	130 (2.0%)
Advise for minor ailment	304 (4.6%)		2304 (35.0%)	2068 (31.4%)	1720 (26.1%)	190 (2.9%)

Tables 5: Responsibility for general health and the people's perception of themselves

Who is responsible for ones general health and well being	Doctors 3637 (55.2%)	Government 154 (2.3%)	Pharmacists 417 (6.3%)	Nurses 429 (6.5%)	All above 1949 (29.6%)
People who go to see the Pharmacist, how do they see themselves	Customers 1541 (23.4%)	Client 792 (12.0%)	Patient 4123 (62.6%)	Liability 130 (2.0%)	

DISCUSSION

The response rate of 91.4% was high, but some factors might have contributed to this high response rate. This could be attributed to the fact that majority of the respondents were urban residents (56.2%) and (29.2%) were resident in sub-urban areas. Also, 74.3% of respondents had tertiary education as shown in (Table 1).

Though, 99.5% respondents have heard of the term Pharmacist, 64.5% do not have a clear understanding of how pharmacists function behind the counter. This is due to the fact that there is no clear identification of who a pharmacist is amongst persons

attending to patients behind the counter.

Respondents in this study accepted that pharmacists are experts in drugs unlike in the study carried out in the UK where the Pharmacists were regarded as chemist⁴. Occasional referral of the Pharmacists as business people like in India was not reflected in this study as the Pharmacists in this study were regarded as Health Care Professionals.

In this study, majority of the respondents reported that they could talk freely about health related issues with their Pharmacist and that the Pharmacist talk about prescription

and provide medication advice on request. This is in contrast with previous studies.⁵

A few study participants (26.1%) responded to seeking advice medically from a pharmacist before the Physician as regards minor illness. In contrast, the majority of the public in Jordan (63%) and in Northern Ireland (67%) reported that would not hesitate to ask the pharmacist for advice, especially if the condition was not serious enough to see the doctor.⁶

The majority of respondents were familiar with the activities of the Pharmacist. However 44.1% disagreed to the statement; Patient care is the activity of a pharmacist

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while 16.5% were undecided.

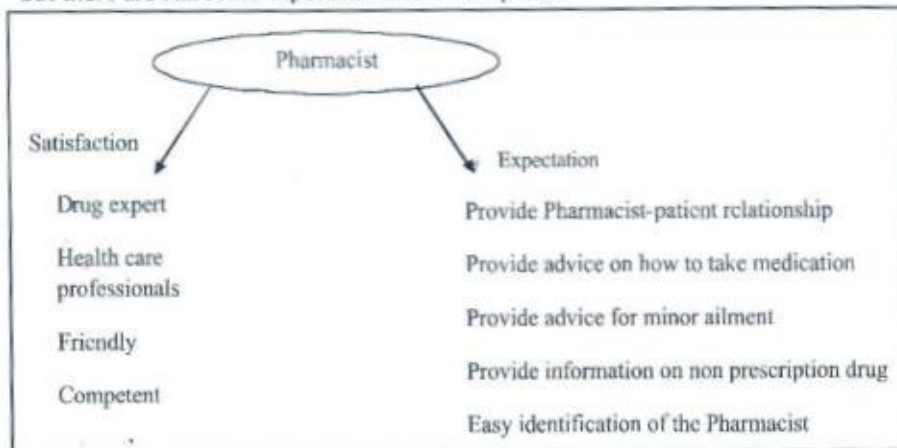
To improve the professional image of pharmacy and broaden the public perceptions of pharmacists, there is need to revise the pharmacy curriculum and make more emphasis which is centered on patient care courses to provide drug information

in a patient centered manner.

A framework has been developed that focuses on the level of expectations one has in a service encounter.⁷ If expectations are high and are met during the service encounter, then satisfaction is likely to be assured. Similarly, if expectations are low but those

expectations are met, satisfaction is still likely to be achieved. In contrast, if expectations are high but are not met, satisfaction is likely to suffer. There is need therefore to meet the expectations of the public in this study to better improve their perceptions towards the pharmacist..

Figure 1: A chart illustrating public's satisfaction and expectation of Pharmacists but there are still some expectations from the public.



These expectations arise from the fact that many practicing pharmacists are not aware about their professional responsibilities.⁸

The basic reasons for this situation are, lack of individual's interest towards the practice, lack of motivation of regulatory bodies towards the profession and often times pursuit of money, thus an inconsistent message is being communicated to the general public about the role of the pharmacists.

Pharmacist should therefore play a pro-active role in becoming an effective and indispensable part of health care. They should equip themselves with appropriate knowledge and competencies in order to tender efficient pharmaceutical health care.⁹

The American Pharmacists Association (AphA) has therefore encouraged all Pharmacists to participate in their "Know your medicine, know your Pharmacist

campaign", so that the public gains a better understanding of the role the Pharmacists play, so this is up to the individual Pharmacists to educate consumers/patients one at a time on a daily basis about their responsibilities. While Pharmacists practice in a range of setting, all should have the same focus-"Optimal drug therapy outcomes through patient centered care", as highlighted in the "blue print for pharmacy".¹⁰

There were limitations to this study, as the research work was restricted to Delta State alone and the findings may not be applicable to other states in the country as well as other countries.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed the perceptions of the public about Pharmacists and the potential for an increased scope of practice for the profession.

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