

Letter to the Editor

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Insight into Turkish Community Pharmacists' Services in the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Community pharmacists (CPs) are the first point of contact for most people during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.¹ CPs are mainly responsible for the supply of medicines and medical equipment and for delivering patient-oriented pharmaceutical services.^{1,2} During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, CPs faced many problems, in addition to the usual practice. This letter aims to summarize the actions and precautions taken by the CPs when coping with the COVID-19 pandemic at Turkish community pharmacies and includes comments on a future emergency action plan in the community setting in Turkey.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CPs have informed patients about COVID-19 (including preventive strategies and clinical information).^{1,2} It has proved crucial to provide CP-led medication information services related to evidence-based medicine. There were many efforts to improve the knowledge of CPs about COVID-19. The Turkish Ministry of Health (TMH) released general training materials for health care professionals, including CPs, to improve their knowledge of COVID-19.³ Before the first case was confirmed in Turkey, videos and brochures with general information about COVID-19 were released by the Turkish Pharmacists' Association. One of the Turkish guidelines about medication management and medication safety with COVID-19 was published with available evidence by clinical pharmacists during the pandemic.⁴

TMH extended the refill prescription deadline to those with chronic diseases until the end of the pandemic. This offered an opportunity to provide medication reviews, ensure medication safety, and prevent potential medication harms.⁵ CPs' skills on patient education and counseling should be improved, especially for individuals with low health literacy and older adults. This pandemic has revealed that there is a need for tele-pharmacy services, especially for such circumstances. However, remote-access pharmacy services are not legal or available in Turkey.

Low provisions of masks, gloves, and sanitizing supplies experienced with the first shock caused by the pandemic were resolved through regulations enacted in March 2020.^{3,5} Turkish CPs' competency in extemporaneous preparation has proved vital to meet the high demand for disinfectants. CPs established a new schedule for personnel shifts to protect pharmacy staff. This should be considered toward developing an urgent action plan for future disasters and pandemics. Continuing education of COVID-19 and a professional development program for CPs should be provided in the emergency action plan that involves CPs more in the development of vaccination campaigns and programs. CPs are valuable health care workers during disasters. The COVID-19 pandemic could be led to a new beginning to improve and extend the task of Turkish CPs (such as patient-oriented services) in the health care system. The involvement of CPs in national structured guidelines will benefit patients and the future of health care.

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