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 in COVID-19 pandemic.\textsuperscript{1} CPs are mainly responsible for the supply of medicines and medical equipment and delivering patient oriented pharmaceutical services.\textsuperscript{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 to cope situation in COVID-19 pandemic at Turkish community pharmacies and comments on future emergency action plan at community setting in Turkey.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CPs have informed patients about COVID-19 (including preventive strategies and, clinical information).\textsuperscript{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 healthcare professionals, including CPs, to improve their knowledge of COVID-19.\textsuperscript{3} Before the first case was confirmed in Turkey, videos, and brochures with general information about COVID-19 were released by Turkish Pharmacist Association. One of the Turkish Guideline about medication management and medication safety in COVID-19 was published with available evidence by clinical pharmacists during the pandemic.\textsuperscript{4}

TMH extended the prescription deadline for refill for chronic diseases until the end of the pandemic. This offered an opportunity to provide medication reviews, ensure medication safety, and prevent potential medication harms.\textsuperscript{5} CPs’ skills on patient education and counselling should be improved especially for individuals with low health literacy and older adults. This pandemic has revealed that there is a need for distant pharmacy services especially for such circumstances. However, tele-pharmacy services do not legally allow in Turkey.

The problem of mask, glove, and sanitizer supplies, experienced with the first shock caused by the pandemic, was resolved through regulations enacted in March 2020.\textsuperscript{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 at developing the urgent action plan for future disasters and pandemic. Continuing Professional Development for CPs should be developed and implemented for this emergency action plan and for new tasks such as CPs’ involvement in vaccination campaigns and programs. Although, CPs faced numerous problems in the first wave of the pandemic, they are valuable healthcare workers during such disasters. This
pandemic could be led to a new beginning to improve and extend the task of Turkish CPs (such as patient oriented services) in healthcare system. In the future, it should be considered the involvement of CPs in national structured guidelines.
References


