

## Patient's Perception of a Pharmacist's Relationship and Counseling Skills in Saudi Arabia

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** To explore the patient's perception of a pharmacist's relationship and counseling skills in Saudi Arabia. **Methods:** This is a 4-month cross-sectional survey of the patient's perception of the pharmacist. The survey consisted of two part: the first part gathers demographic information and the second part contains 49 questions divided into four domains: (1) the first domain captures data regarding the patient's general perception about the pharmacist; (2) the second domain captures data regarding the patient's perception of pharmaceutical services; (3) the third domain was regarding the patient's perception of visiting ambulatory care; and (4) the fourth domain captures the data regarding the patient's perception of pharmacist's relationship and counseling skills. We used the 5-point Likert response scale system to obtain responses of the participants. There were open- and close-ended questions. The survey was distributed through social media at a 500-bed general hospital in Alhasa region, at an ambulatory care pharmacy. The authors interviewed the patients with an electronic survey documentation. The survey was distributed in an electronic format. In this study, we analyzed domain four, that is, about the patient's perception of pharmacist's relationship and counseling skills through Survey Monkey system. **Results:** A total of 617 patients responded to the survey. Of them, 536 (87.7%) were Saudi and 75 (12.3%) were non-Saudi nationals. There were 457 (74.1%) female and 160 (25.9%) male responders. Most of the patients (222 (36%)) visited the pharmacy more than 10 times in the past 12 months, whereas the others (122 (19.8%)) visited the pharmacy at least 5–9 times. Most of the patients (481 (83.5%)) spent less than 11 min with the pharmacist. The average score of patient perception of a pharmacist with communication and relationship skills was 3.66. The following statements received highest scores: "the pharmacist politely delivers the medication" (4.09) and "the pharmacist answers the questions in an excellent way" (3.87). The statement with lowest score was "communication with pharmacy by phone at any time" (3.04) (Table 2). The average score of patient's perceptions of pharmacists with medications counseling skills was 3.6. The statement with highest score was "all the medications received were packed" (4.35) and "the patient understands what the pharmacist was saying" (4.1). The statement with lowest score was "the pharmacist provides you information about the proper storage of your medication" (3.04) and "the pharmacist explains all the possible side effects" (3.12). The statements with highest scores of patient relationship with drug information centers were "the pharmacist answers patient's question through drug information center's hospital over 24/7" (3.44) and "poisonous cases first contact the national drug information center or any hospital drug information center any time through MOH hotline 937 over 24/7" (3.37). **Conclusion:** Patient's perception toward pharmacist's communication and counseling skills need to improve with an emphasis on patient's privacy, contacting facilities and instructions to drug-related problems. Improvement of patient demand will raise patient's perceptions and avoid the unnecessary additional cost.

**Key words:** Perception, Pharmacist, Relationship, Counselling, Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia.

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## INTRODUCTION

The pharmacists provide medication to the patients on a regular basis. They discuss with the patient about their disease and explain drug-related issues and follow-up their case through regular calls or through social media. If the communication is not proper, then the services provided by the pharmacist will not be efficient and they may not follow the pharmacist's advice or recommendations. Several studies have discussed the patient's perception of the pharmacists communication or relationship and patient counseling skills.<sup>[1-3]</sup> The results of different studies have been found to be varied. However, it is difficult to find similar studies in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf or the Middle Eastern countries.<sup>[4]</sup> Therefore, in this study, we explored patient's perception of the pharmacist with an emphasis on his/her communication or relationship and patient counseling skills in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

## METHODS

This is a 4-month cross-sectional survey of patient perception of pharmacists. The survey consisted of two parts: the first part collects demographic information and the second part contains 49 questions divided into four domains: (1) the first domain is regarding patient's general perception of the pharmacist; (2) the second domain is regarding patient's perception of pharmaceutical care services; (3) the third domain captures patient's perception of visiting ambulatory care; and (4) the fourth domain captures patient's perception of pharmacist's relationship and counseling skills. We used the 5-point Likert response scale system to obtain responses. There were open- and close-ended questions. The survey was distributed through the social media to a 500-bed general hospital in Alhassa region at an ambulatory care pharmacy. This hospital has been accredited by the Saudi Central Board of Accreditation for Healthcare Institutions (CBAHI) from Saudi Arabia and by the Joint Commission on Hospital Accreditation from the United States.<sup>[5-6]</sup> The hospital has several departments including adults' internal medicine, adults' surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology. It also has adults, pediatrics and neonatal critical care units with a separate nursing unit, in addition to the medical and surgical ambulatory care clinics. The pharmacy distributes the medication through unit dose system according to CBAHI standards and American Society of Health-System Pharmacists standards. Furthermore, the pharmacy has inpatient pharmacy, outpatient pharmacy, intravenous admixture services

with professional total parenteral nutrition. The clinical pharmacy services cover critical care units, internal medicine, drug information center, patient-counseling services and medication safety program. The authors interviewed the patients with an electronic survey documentation. The survey was in an electronic format and it analyzed domain four, that is, about the patient's perception of pharmacist's relationship and counseling skills through the Survey Monkey system.

## RESULTS

A total of 617 patients responded to the survey. Of them, 536 (87.7%) were Saudi and 75 (12.3%) were non-Saudi nationals. There were 457 (74.1%) female and 160 (25.9%) male responders. Most of them (84.1%) were in the age group of 18–44 years and were located in the regions of Alhassa (255 (41.7%)), Riyadh (150 (24.55%)) and East Province (144 (23.56%)). The highest level of education of the responders was Bachelor's degree (395 (64.4%)) followed by high school (95 (15.5%)). Most of the patients visited the pharmacy more than 10 times in the past 12 months (222 (36%)), whereas the others (122 (19.8%)) visited the pharmacy at least 5–9 times. Most of the patients were attending their follow-up visit (192 (31.1%)), whereas it was their first visit for the rest (43 (7.0%)). Most of the patients visited the pharmacy in the evening (395 (64.0%)). Most of the patients (481 (77.9%)) spent less than 11 min with the pharmacist (Table 1). The average score of patients' perceptions of the pharmacists regarding their communication and relationship skills was 3.66. The following statements in the pharmacist and patient relationship domain received the highest scores: "pharmacist politely delivers the medication" (4.09), "the pharmacist answers questions in an excellent way" (3.87) and "all pharmacists characterized with courtesy and respect" (3.7). The statement with lowest score was "communication with pharmacy by phone at any time" (3.04) (Table 2). The average score of patients' perceptions of pharmacists with medication counseling was 3.6. The statements with highest score were "all the medications received were packed" (4.35) and "the patient understands what the pharmacist was saying" (4.1) followed by "the instruction labeled on each medication" (4.05) and "the pharmacist provides written or printed information, medication and diseases" (3.83). The statement with lowest score was "the pharmacist provides you information about the proper storage of your medication" (3.04), "the pharmacist explains all the possible side effects" (3.12) and "the place of pharmacy counseling respect my

**Table 1: Demographic information regarding responder's qualification.**

	Response Count	Response Percent
Sex		
Female	457	74.07%
Male	160	25.93%
Answered question	617	
Skipped question	0	
Nationality		
Saudi	536	87.73%
Non-Saudi	75	12.27%
Answered question	611	
Skipped question	6	
Age		
<18	35	5.69%
18 - 29	277	45.04%
30 - 44	240	39.02%
45 - 59	60	9.76%
60+	3	0.49%
Answered question	615	
Skipped question	2	
<b>Type of visit</b>	<b>Response Count</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>
First visit	43	18.30%
Follow up	192	81.70%
Answered question	235	
Skipped question	2	
<b>In the last 12 months, the number of times visited the pharmacy</b>	<b>Response Count</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>
None	23	3.73%
1 time	40	6.49%
2	60	9.74%
3	56	9.09%
4	93	15.10%
5 to 9	122	19.81%
10 or more times	222	36.04%
Answered question	616	
Skipped question	1	

**Table 1: Demographic information regarding responder's qualification.**

	Response Count	Response Percent
<b>Time of Visiting the Pharmacy</b>	<b>Response Count</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>
Morning	116	18.99%
Evening	395	64.65%
Night	100	16.37%
Answered question	611	
Skipped question	6	
<b>The waiting time to get the medications</b>	<b>Response Count</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>
< 5	293	50.87%
5-10	188	32.64%
11-15	53	9.20%
16-20	17	2.95%
21-25	4	0.69%
26-30	10	1.74%
31-35	1	0.17%
36-40	2	0.35%
41-45	3	0.52%
46-50	0	0.00%
51-55	1	0.17%
56-60	1	0.17%
More than 60	3	0.52%
Answered question	576	
Skipped question	41	
<b>Educational levels</b>	<b>Response Count</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>
Doctorate degree	10	1.63%
Master degree	32	5.22%
Bachelor Degree	395	64.44%
Diploma	46	7.50%
High school	95	15.50%
Intermediate School	29	4.73%
Primary School	5	0.82%
Not educated	1	0.16%
Answered question	613	
Skipped question	4	

**Table 2: Patient perception of the pharmacist regarding his communication and relationship skills.**

No.	Answer Options	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Rating Average	Response Count
1	When you are receiving your prescription medications, the pharmacist delivers your medicines in a polite way	174	296	77	15	6	4.09	568
2	Pharmacists have technical skills (thoroughness, carefulness, competence).	96	234	165	63	8	3.61	566
3	All pharmacists characterized with courtesy and respect.	119	233	147	56	10	3.70	565
4	The way the pharmacist answers my questions excellent.	119	292	121	24	8	3.87	564
5	Getting through to the pharmacy by phone is easy and at any times	63	139	167	129	58	3.04	556
	<i>answered question</i>							572
	<i>skipped question</i>							45

**Table 3: Patient perception of the pharmacist regarding his patient medication counseling skills.**

No.	Answer Options	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Rating Average	Response Count
1	The place of pharmaceutical counseling respects your privacy.	73	176	141	115	52	3.18	557
2	All medications you received packed.	278	247	39	10	6	4.35	580
3	Instructions labeled on each medication	233	223	60	39	22	4.05	577
4	Instructions that contains: (patient's name, medication's name, medication's strength and how to use) written clearly.	150	215	91	78	41	3.62	575
5	The pharmacist provides you written/ or printed information about drug therapy and diseases.	161	254	88	54	22	3.83	579
6	The pharmacist Explains to you how to know if medications are working	134	192	98	100	51	3.45	575
7	The pharmacist explains all the possible side effects	103	149	115	128	78	3.12	573
8	The pharmacist provides you information about the proper storage of your medication.	86	146	116	147	74	3.04	569
9	The pharmacist provides you with thorough medication counseling and encourages you to ask questions.	110	177	128	87	67	3.31	569
10	You understand what pharmacist saying	169	317	58	15	8	4.10	567
	<b>answered question</b>							<b>586</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>							<b>31</b>

**Table 4: Patients' relationships with drug information centers.**

No	Answer Options	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Rating Average	Response Count
1	Telephone numbers of hospital drug information centers are available and easy to access	70	124	169	153	68	2.96	592
2	The pharmacist answer patient question through drug information center hospital over 24/7	98	158	245	49	27	3.44	593
3	National drug information center provides consultation services and answer questions through MOH hotline 937 over 24/7	66	153	294	37	20	3.36	590
4	If there are any poisonous cases first contact the national drug information center or any hospital drug information center any time through MOH hotline 937 over 24/7	94	144	244	57	33	3.37	585
	<b>answered question</b>							<b>587</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>							<b>30</b>

privacy" (3.18) (Table 3). The statements with highest score related to the patient relationship with drug information centers was "the pharmacist answers patients questions through drug information center's hospital over 24/7" (3.44) and "poisonous cases first contact the national drug information center or any hospital drug information center any time through MOH hotline 937 over 24/7" (3.37) (Table 4).

## DISCUSSION

The general administration of pharmaceutical care has provided several programs to the patients and pharmacists since the past few years<sup>[7]</sup> which includes but not limited to the drug information services through hotline call centers (937) at the Ministry of Health (MOH), patient counseling program, the patient's satisfaction of pharmacy program, pain

management services, anticoagulation program and medications safety services.<sup>[8-11]</sup> The essential part was the communication and relationship between the patient and the pharmacist which demands critical skills from the pharmacist and without this particular element, all the previous services will no longer be appreciated.<sup>[12]</sup> The author of this study tried to explore the perception of the patients with an emphasis on the communication and relationship skills. The results showed that the patients perceived the pharmacists communication and relationship skills as good. The patients found that the pharmacist delivered the medications politely, was kind and respectful and was careful in answering any inquiries if necessary. Despite this, the patient responded that there was no adequate and easy contact with a pharmacist. This might be because the pharmacy's contact number might not have been printed on the label of medications or on the pharmacy's dashboard. The results regarding the pharmacist answering the patient's questions in an excellent way as part of the patient education services was reported to be higher than that reported by Oshima *et al.* which might be due to the differences in their performance.<sup>[13]</sup> The result regarding perception of patients with medication counseling was acceptable, which was found to be higher than what has been reported by Al-Arifi and Merks *et al.*<sup>[4,14]</sup> It resembles what reported by Jose *et al.* that is due to the pharmacy provide good services with emphasis on counseling program.<sup>[15]</sup> Moreover, our results were found to be lower than what has been reported by Schindel *et al.* which may be because they applied the patient counseling services before out site.<sup>[16]</sup> The patient received medication counseling with complete medication package and appropriate labels and printed material. While the patients missed the privacy during counseling and education regarding drug-related problems, information regarding storage of medication by the pharmacist was lacking. This may be because the design of the pharmacy counseling is not appropriate or the pharmacist was busy. The patient perception of the pharmacist at the hotline drug information center (937) was good with regular or drug overdose-related inquiries. This might be related to the pharmacist working in the national drug information center through the network of drug information centers across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The network connected with Ministry of Health hotline number (937). The hotline founded in 2014 to receive any patient related inquiries and problems and answering drug information call. The drug information inquiries answered by the network of drug information centers. The evaluation of the performance of national

drug information published with the cost saving of prevention of drug-related problems.<sup>[17]</sup> Furthermore, the network of drug information centers assessment done with several elements published elsewhere. However, the patient perception of pharmacist through drug information center or hotline 937 not posted yet. The study the first study of patient perception assessment of the services and some finding could not compare with previous investigations.

## CONCLUSION

The patient's perception of the pharmacist related to his communication, relationship and patient counseling skills was found to be acceptable including the MOH hotline of answering drug information inquiries. This is the first study conducted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We intend to conduct an in-depth research about the topic in our future studies.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

None.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

## ABBREVIATIONS

**KSA:** Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; **MOH:** Ministry of Health; **CBAHI:** Saudi Central Board for Accreditation of Healthcare Institutions; **USA:** United States of America.

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