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**SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE PHARMACISTS' PROFESSIONAL
ROLE**

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Abstract

The work of pharmacists is determined to be significant in health preserving practice. It is known that pharmacists are specialists who deal with pharmaceutical support to patients. Professional role of pharmacists in modern society based on the study of attitudes of pharmaceutical experts, doctors and patients has been revealed. Drug therapy consumers, pharmacists and doctors were measured by the questionnaire held in the Saratov region. According to the survey, almost 82% of medical staff and 78% of pharmacists stressed the necessity of cooperative work. Various attitudes of medical and pharmaceutical experts have been stated towards the choice of individual drug therapy. Pharmacists support the suggestion on the independent choice of over-the-counter medication by patients. Otherwise doctors consider it impossible. All the respondents are certain that the realization of medical preparations should not be allowed in department stores and supermarkets, only chemist's shops. The survey respondents express various attitudes towards chemist's shop. Chemist's shop is represented as a part of medical service system by pharmacists, as a special organization by doctors, and as a unit of healthcare system by drug therapy consumers. The pharmacist is called upon to ensure interaction in the drug supply system in the interests of the patient. This fact proves the social significance of the professional role of a pharmaceutical specialist in modern society.

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1. Introduction

Pharmaceutical specialists can influence the public consciousness and participate in the formation of national health. The pharmacists' role in the prevention of diseases, promotion of a healthy lifestyle, and protection of public health is noted. The status and role of a pharmacist is actively discussed at the international level (Bell et al., 2016; Hermansyah et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2020; Petrelli et al., 2019). Despite the fact that the profession of a pharmacist in different countries has its own specifics and the system of training and admission to pharmaceutical activity also differs, at present, there are general trends in the development of pharmacy as a socio-economic branch. The increasing social role of pharmacists in modern society is influenced by many factors, for example, demographic growth, the development of the pharmaceutical industry, socio-economic and political changes, the population orientation to prevent diseases, the active development of online commerce, the availability of specialists as professionals in the health sector, and many others (Ilardo & Speciale, 2020). This creates prerequisites for the inclusion of the pharmacists' activities in the practice of primary health care and confirms their significant impact on the life quality and treatment of patients (Benson et al., 2019; Schindel et al., 2019).

Pharmacist is a profession the practical focus of which has been transformed from the product to the patient (Schindel et al., 2017). Among the main duties of a pharmacist may be underlined the following: giving professional advice to patients on how to take and how to store medicines, preparation for drug dispensing, over-the-counter medications storage control and health-related products, etc. (Son et al., 2019). Provision of patients with pharmaceutical aid (Costa et al., 2017) in most cases results from cooperation between a pharmacist and a doctor (Agomo et al., 2016) and has a positive effect on patient adherence to treatment (Patton et al., 2018). According to the scientific literature it is pointed out that pharmaceutical aid positively influences healthcare as a whole (Son et al., 2019).

2. Problem Statement

Chemist's shops are considered as a unit vitally important in the preserving health practice as well as the medical staff – particularly pharmacists, who in close contact with patients – drug therapy consumers. Foundation and development of professional associations of chemists, integration of pharmacists into market economy, influence gain in the healthcare sphere and quality improvement of pharmaceutical advices at chemist's shops lead to an opportunity to choose methods of reliable self-treatment of patients and as a result affect both medical staff and pharmacists.

Pharmacies (including their staff), health professionals (doctors) and patients estimated as consumers of medical and pharmaceutical services remain on a significant level of pharmaceutical market and therefore in mutual cooperation. Having general goals to improve public health by means of rational consumption of pharmaceutical products, there are individual professional tasks which may differ significantly. Conflict of interest occurs deteriorating the efficacy of the work of pharmaceutical provision industry. To increase this parameter much attention should be paid to professional consciousness of pharmacists and to adequate attitudes of medical staff and patients towards pharmacists as a part of professional team.

3. Research Questions

The authors of the research take an empirical attempt to find out answers to the following questions:

- what is the professional role of a pharmacist?
- what is the significance of the functions performed by a pharmaceutical specialist for society?
- what are the needs for interprofessional interaction between doctors and pharmacists in the interests of the patient?

4. Purpose of the Study

The research goal is to define the professional role of pharmacists in modern society. Attitudes of consumers of pharmaceutical market products and comparative research have served as the survey tools.

5. Research Methods

Social science research in the form of specially designed questionnaire was held anonymously among three groups of respondents: drug therapy consumers (patients) (N=778), pharmacists (N=407) and health professionals (doctors of different specialities) (N=343) in Saratov and the Saratov region.

The data from the research have been processed, revealing the absolute and the relative (%). The relative is presented with standard deviation on 100 of respondents. The mean is measured in the form of $M \pm m$ where M is the mean, and m – standard deviation. Statistical processing is provided by Microsoft Excel 2010 programmes and Biostatistics (Primer of Biostatistics by Stanton A. Glantz), SPSS 22. The variability is calculated by Pearson's chi-squared test (χ^2). Initial estimate is not lower than 95 % at $p < 0.05$.

6. Findings

Comparative research based on the opinions of respondents has shown that the most important pharmacist's role for drug therapy consumers is to retail low-cost and broad-spectrum medications; for doctors – to provide drug dispensing for preferential groups of citizens, and for pharmacists – to give professional advice (Table 01). However, all the mentioned above roles are placed at the top of three in each group of respondents (out of 9 possible).

Table 1. Important role statements of pharmacists according to the survey results (by direct ranking method)

Role statement	Consumers	Doctors	Pharmacists
	Average rank (M ± m)		
Retailing of low-cost and broad-spectrum medications	3.07±0.08	3.34±0.13	4.07±0.13
Giving pharmaceutical advice	3.47±0.08	3.99±0.13	3.00±0.11
Drug dispensing for preferential groups of citizens	4.11±0.08	3.23±0.11	3.64±0.10
Emergency	4.64±0.10	6.75±0.14	5.24±0.13
Drugs made by individual prescriptions	4.87±0.08	4.20±0.11	4.35±0.11
Giving pharmaceutical advice by telephone	5.54±0.08	5.40±0.10	5.83±0.11

Additional medical service (blood pressure measurement, medical consultation and etc.)	5.76±0.07	5.97±0.11	5.99±0.10
Pharmaceutical care (inter-relation with patient, doctor for drug therapy period)	6.73±0.08	5.77±0.13	6.03±0.13
Sanitary and educational work aimed at disease prevention	6.82±0.07	6.36±0.12	6.86±0.10

It could be therefore said that medical society accepts the priority of such pharmacist's role as giving professional advice. Though doctors consider that pharmacists' recommendations and corrections of administered drug therapy are not congruent (46.6±0.4 %). This proves the fact that doctors' attitude towards pharmacists is doubtful and it may negatively influence inter-relation with patients.

Medical and pharmaceutical experts stress the necessity of collective work and its significance in recent years (81.9±0.5 % of health professionals and 78.1±0.4 % of pharmacists). Alongside doctors point to the fact that inter-relationship with other professionals can promote the study of chemists industry (45.8±0.4 %) and issues concerned with patients' drug therapy (36.1±0.3 %) and drug provision for preferential groups of citizens (Figure 01). Furthermore relationship can improve pharmacists' authority and competencies and confirm their social significance.

Professional authority and role of a specialist are defined by working conditions. Medical organization should motivate workers to meet patients' demands in health and safety. Pharmaceutical performance is realized predominantly in market economy conditions leading to another quality of pharmacists. Chemists industry has market concentration aims (benefits from retailing pharmaceutical products) apart from social needs (provision of highly qualified pharmaceutical service to population). Taking into account the specifics of pharmaceutical and medical organizations both of these professional groups are aimed to meet social demands. This fact explains the multi-disciplinary working of doctors and pharmacists to perform additional social function of drug therapy management for patients.

The attitudes of medical staff and pharmacists towards independent choice of pharmaceutical products by patients differs reliably ($\chi^2=176.326$; $p<0.001$). Pharmacists support the concern about independent choice of over-the-counter pharmaceutical products by patients (76.2±0.4 %). Otherwise doctors consider it not congruent even for over-the-counter pharmaceutical products (66.8±0.4 %). Negative attitude towards the issue described above might be explained by the accepted in medical society opinion on unfavorable effect from intake medicines without control.

Common attitude towards unappropriated retailing of pharmaceutical products in store departments and supermarkets has been identified in all the three groups of respondents – population (96.0±0.3 % of drug therapy consumers) and professional communities (95.9±0.5 % of doctors and 98.3±0.5 % of pharmacists). In Russia pharmaceutical experts responsible for giving professional advice on side-effects and other properties of pharmaceutical products work at chemist's shops.

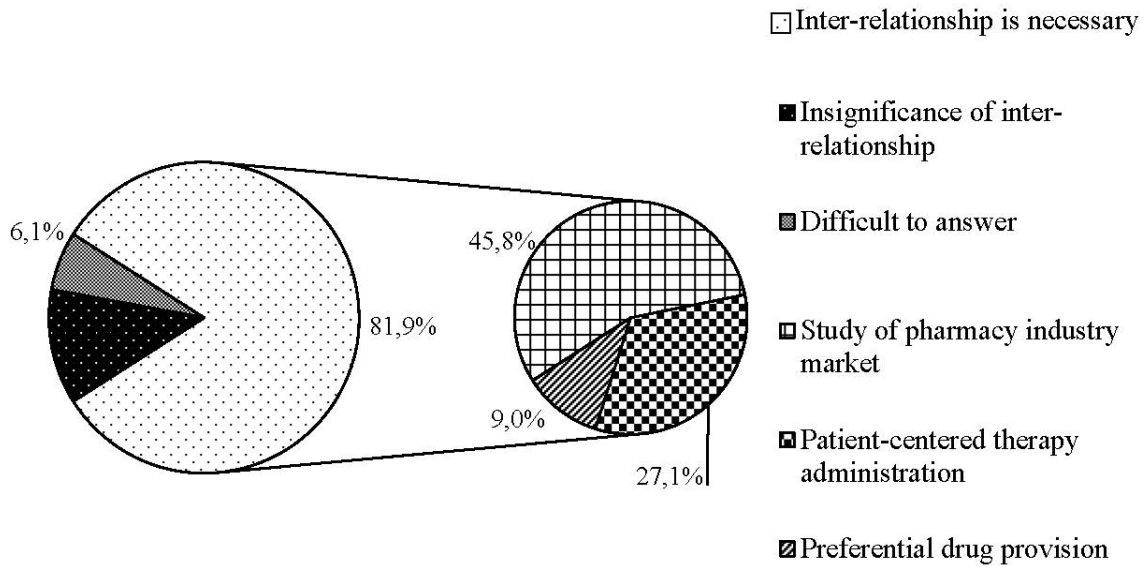


Figure 1. Inter-relationship with doctors and pharmacists (according to doctors' attitudes)

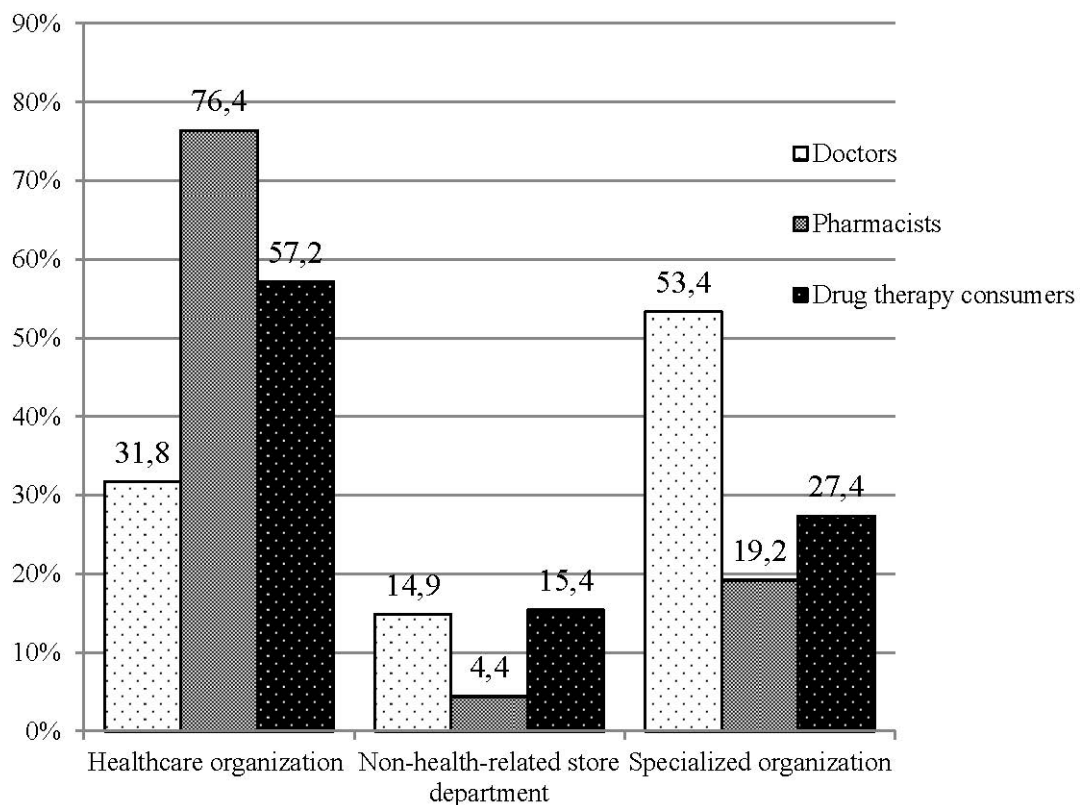


Figure 2. Comparative characteristics of attitudes of doctors, pharmacists and drug therapy consumers towards pharmacies and chemist's shops

All the groups of respondents have various attitudes towards pharmacy and chemists organizations ($\chi^2=156.450$; $p<0.001$). Attitudes of professional community experts include: chemist's shop as a structural unit of medical service system (76.4 ± 0.4 % of pharmacists), chemist's shop as a specialized organization (53.4 ± 0.4 % of doctors). Consequently, health professionals mark the distant relation to

pharmaceutical market subjects. Drug therapy consumers share the attitude of pharmacists and consider chemist's shop as a healthcare unit (57.2±0.3 %). It has been found out that pharmacists do not support other respondents on the attitude towards chemist's shop as a non-health-related store department (Figure 02).

Therefore, the roles of pharmacists include giving professional advice to doctors and consumers about the choice and the use of pharmaceutical products and retailing of medicines. These factors contribute to professional consciousness development and may produce contradictions.

The main reason is determined to be unlikely recognized role of pharmacists by doctors. Absence of inter-relationship with health professionals and pharmaceutical experts negatively influence on realization of patients' demands. Besides patients' aggressive attitudes towards pharmaceutical experts as workers of market industry develop conditions for reliable self-treatment therefore deteriorating health and safety.

7. Conclusion

Professional role of a pharmacist for all the subjects of pharmaceutical level comprises giving professional pharmaceutical advice, retailing of economically available health-related products of broad-spectrum and drug dispensing for preferential groups of citizens. This determines the high social significance of the profession.

Being appropriately educated, pharmacists evaluate their professional role and take responsibilities for giving pharmaceutical advice to patients on the choice of medicines (use, storage and etc.). It should be noted that giving professional advice is a social demand which provides reliable self-treatment. Healthcare workers underline the professional role of pharmacists in provision of essential drugs to preferential groups of citizens and in dispensing available for them medications. Drug therapy consumers support the attitude towards pharmacists concerned with provision of essential low-cost health-related products to the population.

It should be concluded that pharmacist is a part of highly trained team in the system of medical service. Furthermore, the role of pharmacist cannot be defined in isolation without considering the inter-relationships with other professionals. In this hierarchy, doctor – pharmacist – drug therapy consumer, interests of patients and public may be served and potentially provided by pharmaceutical experts. This fact proves the social significance of professional role of pharmacists in modern society.

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