



Pandemic Frontliners: Lived Experiences of Hospital Pharmacists From Sultan Kudarat during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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KeyWords

Hospital Pharmacists, Pandemic Frontliner, COVID-19 Pandemic, Sultan Kudarat.

ABSTRACT

The occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the daily lives of every individual and affected the work of front liners, especially if there are a lot of patients affected by the virus. Thus, this qualitative-descriptive research was conducted to deeply understand and describe the experiences of every front liner who became heroes during the said pandemic. This study used methodologies to identify the work challenges and coping strategies of pharmacists during the COVID-19 pandemic as a basis for a proposed program and to create a framework of crisis management among pharmacists. The study utilized a non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience. A non-random selection of samples was used because not all members of the population have an equal chance of participating in this study since we are looking for particular hospital pharmacists who work from Covid-19 facilities. There are at least a total of fifteen (15) licensed registered pharmacists working in Covid-19 Facilities of Sultan Kudarat, Philippines. The questionnaire is composed of open-ended questions based on the challenges experienced by COVID-19 hospital pharmacists thru in-depth interviews. These are vital in understanding how the level of motivation amongst hospital pharmacists affects their day-to-day performances. Challenges are inevitable in the field of pharmacy, most especially now that this pandemic is still existing. No one can decide when and how these challenges will hit, so being prepared is always the hospital pharmacist's number one weapon against these barriers.

INTRODUCTION

After 100 years, the world again faced another fearful event that alerts many countries around the globe including the Philippines. COVID-19 or also known as the Novel Corona Virus, is a new strain of virus created in China that damages the human respiratory system and is a public health emergency that has already resulted in deaths and socio-economic disruption worldwide (Nicola et al., 2020). We all are dealing with the new virus as it causes changes in every aspect of our life, several people have lost their job, and some experience depression because they do not have the money to buy even their necessities. As the battle against the virus continues, challenges among medical staff and front-liners arise. Health workers continue to provide patient care and set aside what they feel and how they are doing amid the COVID-19 Pandemic. With this in mind, health workers face an extraordinary challenge to respond to a Pandemic (Schwerdtle et al., 2020).

Health workers such as pharmacists generally become a pharmacist because of the desire to help people regain and maintain optimal health by providing effective medicine, and here, we have a situation where there may be very few options to help those who are seriously ill because of COVID-19. The inability to save lives will affect those people on the front line both physically and emotionally (Jackson et al., 2020).

Thus, this study explored the challenges faced by pharmacists when providing care during the COVID-19 crisis and served as a formal platform where pharmacists' voices were heard.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

A qualitative descriptive research design was used for this study. The researchers used a survey questionnaire to collect the data and it includes the distribution of the survey questionnaire to the hospital pharmacy at Sultan Kudarat Hospitals providing services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sample size has a total of 15 licensed hospital pharmacists employed in the Sultan Kudarat Provincial Hospital and to those participants who were not included in our inclusion criteria were excluded from the study.

SAMPLING AND SAMPLE SIZE

The sample size has a total of 15 respondents consisting of licensed registered pharmacists coming from the Sultan Kudarat Hospitals. The sample size was based on the availability of the employed licensed hospital pharmacists in Sultan Kudarat Hospitals during the conduct of the study.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The researchers used a self-made questionnaire after thoroughly reviewing the literature on the Hospital Pharmacies in Sultan Kudarat Hospitals. It was composed of open-ended questions based on the challenges experienced by COVID-19 hospital phar-

macists thru in depth interviews. The survey questionnaire is used to gather information about the experiences of the hospital pharmacists in Sultan Kudarat Hospitals. During the interview, session questions will be thrown in an organized pattern. Moreover, non-verbal cues such as facial expression and posture will also observe. To ensure that the interview data are valid, notes will be taken and a recorder from the app will be utilized to get the reliability of the data and to prevent loss of information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SOP #1: What are the experiences of Hospital Pharmacists in Sultan Kudarat that affects their well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Theme 1: **New Normal, New changes: Embracing Covid-19**

Theme 2: **Covid-19 invasion**

Theme 3: **Psychological experience: Fear and Anxiety**

SOP 1 identifies the different experiences stated and encountered by hospital pharmacist regarding their well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic in Sultan Kudarat, Philippines, the researchers identified three (3) major themes. Namely: (1) New Normal, New changes: Embracing Covid-19 (2) Covid-19 invasion (3) Psychological experience: Fear and Anxiety

As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve, we will continue to persevere and hope that the concepts we have introduced will allow us to contain and nimbly adapt to the situation as it unfolds. It is possible that this pandemic may be a new normative state, and we may have to develop new infection control standards such that operations can continue with minimal risk to staff and patients (*Chen, R.C., Tan, T.T. & Chan, L.P., 2020*).

Previous studies have reported adverse psychological reactions to the 2003 SARS outbreak among healthcare workers. Studies showed that those healthcare workers feared contagion and infection of their family, friends, and colleagues, felt uncertainty and stigmatization, reported reluctance to work or contemplating resignation, and reported experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms, which could have long-term psychological implications. Similar concerns about the mental health, psychological adjustment, and recovery of healthcare workers treating and caring for patients with COVID-19 are now arising. (Lai J, Ma S, Wang Y, et al.,2020).

During such dire times, pharmacists are being relied upon more and more to provide much-needed services during the pan-

demically. Pharmacists, like other HCWs, know how important their role is and are resilient in providing care even at the expense of their own mental and physical well-being. It is well known that mental illness is associated with lower life expectancy and poorer health outcomes than the general population, increasing the risk of infection with COVID-19. It is uncertain what exactly the long-term sequelae may be, but there is evidence that such sequelae exist. It was found that 3 years after the SARS outbreak in 2003, high-risk HCWs remained highly stressed, which was associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and general psychological distress (Maunder RG, Lancee WJ, Balderson KE, et al., 2006).

Thus, hospital pharmacists during the COVID-19 pandemic experience a great impact to adapt the new normal to work, COVID-19 exposure then increased anxiety and stress levels among pharmacists are crucial and if unaddressed it will lead to a shortage of pharmacists after the end of the pandemic.

SOP #2: What are the work challenges and barriers experienced by the hospital pharmacists in Sultan Kudarat during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Theme 1: **The chain of cross contamination**

Theme 2: **The perceived workload effects**

Theme 3: **Disrupted communication calls for COVID-19**



SOP 2, aims to identify the work challenges and barriers experienced by the hospital pharmacist in Sultan Kudarat during the COVID-19 pandemic providing three (3) themes, namely (1) The chain of cross-contamination (2) Disrupted communication calls for COVID-19 (3) The perceived workload effects.

With the ongoing pandemic of COVID-19, occupational contact of HCWs is therefore among the most vital concerns which need to be addressed comprehensively and decisively. It is imperative to ensure the safety of HCWs not only to safeguard continuous patient care but also to ensure they do not transmit the virus (Sabetian, G., Moghadami, M., Hashemizadeh Fard Haghighi, L. et al, 2021).

The theme aligned with the results of the study done by Lai J, Ma S, Wang Y, et al.,

(2019) states that facing this critical situation, healthcare workers on the front line who are directly involved in the diagnosis, treatment, and care of patients with COVID-19 are at risk of developing psychological distress and other mental health symptoms. The ever-increasing number of confirmed and suspected cases, overwhelming workload, depletion of personal protection equipment, widespread media coverage, lack of specific drugs, and feelings of inadequately supported may all contribute to the mental burden of these healthcare workers.

Therefore, the hospital pharmacist faced many problems during the pandemic identified the barriers such as excessive work load, communications, and cross-contamination that affect pharmacist work and performance.

SOP #3: What motivates the hospital pharmacists in Sultan Kudarat to continue working amidst the COVID-19 pandemic?

THEME 1: A HOUSEHOLD THAT ENERGIZES EFFORT

THEME 2: EAGERNESS FOR THE SAKE OF PROFESSION

THEME 3: NURTURED POSITIVE ATTITUDE

SOP 3, which aims to determine the motivations of the hospital pharmacists in Sultan Kudarat to continue working amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, identified three (3) themes. The following themes are (1) Nurtured positive attitude (2) Eagerness for the sake of profession (3) A household that energizes effort.

In these challenging times, health workers need adequate support to increase their productivity and keep them motivated (Pathania et al., 2020). This study indicated that for healthcare workers in Indonesia, family support is the main factor that motivates healthcare workers to provide healthcare services during the COVID-19 outbreak. So, it is important to provide opportunities for healthcare workers to make contact and gather with families to provide mutual support. If it is impossible to meet family members, then each family member needs to communicate regularly by sending positive messages and motivating health workers to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak in good psychological condition. Notwithstanding, good collaboration between professionals, effective preventive measures, and a positive attitude when dealing with the pandemic also play an important role in reducing stress. The availability of adequate information and support from hospitals also helped motivate the health workers in this study to deal with the outbreak Windarwati (H. D., Ati, N., Paraswati, M. D., Ilmy, S. K., Supianto, A. A., Rizzal, A. F., Sulaksono, A. D., Lestari, R., & Supriati, L., 2021).

The theme supports the study of *Dimitrios P. Stergiou, Anna Farmaki, (2021)* states that a pandemic crisis has the potential to influence the number of employees who report to work. Absenteeism in a pandemic situation is directly affected by two important variables: an employee's (un)willingness to show up for work, and an employee's ability to report to duty. In this context, "ability refers to the capability of the individual to report to work, whereas willingness refers to a personal decision to report to work" (*Qureshi et al., 2005: 379*). Worker performance is also contingent on workers' willingness to come to work regularly, work diligently, be flexible, and carry out the necessary tasks (*Hornby & Sidney, 1988*).

As a result, in order to keep them going, the hospital pharmacist must keep them inspired by their family and passionate about their work.

SOP #4: What are the recommendations of Hospital Pharmacists in Sultan Kudarat as frontliners during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Theme 1: **Pay us more, we need better compensation**

Theme 2: **Strengthening resilience to pandemic: Readiness and intention to the new normal**

SOP 4, to determine the recommendations of the hospital in Sultan Kudarat as front liners during the Covid-19 pandemic, provided two (2) themes. The following themes are (1) Pay us more, we need better compensation, and (2) Strengthening resilience to the pandemic: Readiness and intention to the new normal.

Financial incentives have been recognized to be an essential motivation for health professionals, in countries where government salaries and wages are insufficient to cover health workers' and their families' fundamental requirements. The incentives are higher pay, salary supplements, benefits, and allowances. When intrinsic motivation is low, family motivation increases job performance by providing strength as well as relieving stress. It also concludes that supporting a family is a powerful source of motivation that can increase job performance.

The theme supports the findings by *Biddlestone, M., Green, R., & Douglas, K. M. (2020)* wherein they reveal that it is up to us to adapt to the challenges of the current pandemic and similar crises, and whether we respond positively or negatively can greatly affect our personal and social lives. Indeed, there are many lessons we can learn from this crisis that can be used in building a better society. How we open to change will depend on our capacity to adapt, to manage resilience in the face of adversity, flexibility, and

creativity without forcing us to make changes. As long as the world has not found a safe and effective vaccine, we may have to adjust to a new normal as people get back to work, school, and a more normal life. As such, 'we have reached the end of the beginning. New conventions, rituals, images, and narratives will no doubt emerge, so there will be more work for cultural sociology before we get to the beginning of the end.

Most of the respondent's recommendation is salary incentives because of the informal payment for health services that may affect the quality of health care. It also may motivate health employees to work harder, especially if there is competition among health workers for earning the payments. The COVID-19 outbreak has increased worldwide concern about the economy, health, money, travel, and employment. While many things are beyond our control at this time, it is important to adapt to these changes and handle the future with caution.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, challenges are inevitable in the field of pharmacy, most especially now that there is still a pandemic. No one can decide when and how these challenges would hit, so being prepared is always the hospital pharmacist's number one weapon against these barriers. All of the challenges have to be addressed properly; otherwise, they would slowly result in a negative impact on hospital pharmacists, most especially in their job. Anyone who would go to work without motivation would feel that their day is wasted and/or they were not productive within the day's work. As a result, understanding the importance of adhering, and promoting the right set of motivation toward the hospital pharmacist's work is necessary for attaining their goal, whether as a group or individually. Recommendations are meant to improve a certain concept, and that is exactly what the hospital pharmacists think of their role in the hospital that they are working with. Changes are bound to happen in the work environment whether the administration likes it or not; however, by deeply and thoroughly examining the most efficient parts, the hospital pharmacists would understand what is necessary to be added.

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