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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Patient's perception of the image of community pharmacists

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Abstract

Background: Patients' understanding of the pharmacists' role is needed to create a positive image so that it is easier for pharmacists to make patients understand the use of drugs. **Objective:** This study aimed to assess the public perception of the image of pharmacists in providing services to patients. **Method:** An observational study was conducted on fifty-three (53) respondents who received pharmaceutical services directly from pharmacists at the pharmacies in East Java. The research variable was the pharmacists' image which is measured through competence, ethics, communication skills, and emotional intelligence based on the perception of the patient. **Result:** The majority of pharmacists had good ratings for their competence and ethics (96%), and most of the pharmacists were perceived to have good communication skills and emotional intelligence (92% and 79% respectively). **Conclusion:** The pharmacists' images, according to the patients' perception were in the "good" category, although there is a need to be an increase in emotional intelligence.

Introduction

The health services rendered by pharmacists have an important role in improving patient health. Not only is the role of pharmacists that of drug sellers, but pharmacists must also provide drug information services, monitor drug therapy, and conduct health screenings for patients (Beardsley *et al.*, 2012). The shift in the role of pharmacists from product-oriented to patient-oriented has been ongoing for years (Fei, 2018). Pharmacists have more knowledge about treatment, side effects, and how to use drugs than do other health workers (Perepelkin, 2011).

Patients' understanding of the role of pharmacists is needed to create positive patient reactions to pharmacists' professionalism and courtesy in providing pharmaceutical services that may represent the image of a good pharmacist. The image of pharmacists is important when providing professional services such as pharmaceutical services; therefore, professional expectations and courtesy expectations of pharmacists

will increase and produce positive reactions from patients (Sabater-Galindo *et al.*, 2017).

A positive image makes it easier for pharmacists to make patients more trusting, obedient and understanding about the use of drugs and services provided through their competence, ethics, communication skills, and emotional intelligence. There is, therefore, the need for the public to accept the role of pharmacists in pharmaceutical services. This study aimed to assess the public perception of the image of pharmacists in providing services.

Methods

Design

The research was conducted using the observational method from May to June 2022. Respondents were selected through the following inclusion criteria: receiving pharmaceutical services directly from

pharmacists at a dispensary, aged over 18 years, and filling out the informed consent form. The study protocol was approved by the Health Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Pharmacy, Universitas Airlangga, with approval number 1/LE/2022.

Data were collected at East Java pharmacies using a non-probability sampling method, which obtained a sample size of 53 respondents. The research instrument was a valid and reliable questionnaire. The research variable is the pharmacist's image, which is measured through the domains of competence, ethics, communication skills, and emotional intelligence based on the perception of the patient receiving the service.

Assessment

The questionnaire on the patient's perception of the pharmacist's image in providing pharmaceutical services uses five types of responses, each using a five-point Likert scale with different options, namely 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = always. Each item is given a score of one to five, and then the average is calculated.

The measurement used to assess the patient's perception of the pharmacist's image in providing pharmaceutical services is a categorical scale with a division: namely, a mean score < 2.33 is categorised as poor, 2.33 - 3.66 is sufficient, and > 3.66 is good. Statistical analysis was undertaken in the form of frequency distribution to see the results regarding the description of the respondent's characteristic data, the disease suffered, the duration of visits to the pharmacy, and the patient's perception of the pharmacist's image.

Results

Table I shows the characteristics of the respondents, the duration of visits to the pharmacy, and the illness that they had suffered. The results showed that most of them were female, many as 27 people (50.94%), the age range of 36–45 years among as many as 14 people (26.42%), and senior high school education among as many as 27 people (50.94%), and with as many as 22 people (41.52%) self-employed. The frequency of respondent visits to the pharmacy is mostly one to five times per month, with as many as 38 people (71.70%) visiting the pharmacy without complaints, many as 16 people (30.19%).

Table I: The general characteristics of respondents (N = 53)

Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Male	26	49.06
Female	27	50.94
Age		
18–25	9	16.98
26–35	12	22.64
36–45	14	26.42
46–55	8	15.09
56–65	7	13.21
More than 65	3	5.66
Educational background		
Junior high school or less	6	1.32
Senior high school	27	50.94
College/university	20	37.73
Occupation		
Housewife	8	15.09
Government employee	13	24.53
Self-employed	22	41.52
Retired	2	3.77
Student	8	15.09
The frequency of respondent visits to the pharmacy (times per month)		
1–5	38	71.70
More than 5	15	28.30
Disease suffered		
Diabetes mellitus	10	18.87
Hypertension	8	15.09
Allergies	3	5.67
Cough and cold	5	9.43
Gastritis	6	11.32
Heart disease	5	9.43
Without complaints	16	30.19

Table II shows the patients' perception of the pharmacists' image in providing pharmaceutical services, as measured through four domains: competence, ethics, communication skills, and emotional intelligence. Competence and ethics of pharmacists are mostly in the good category, both with the same value of 51 people (96%). Likewise, with the communication skills and emotional intelligence of pharmacists, most of them were in a good category, with values of 49 people (92%) and 42 people (79%), respectively.

Table II: Patients' perception of the pharmacist's image in providing pharmaceutical services (N = 53)

Domain	Category		
	Poor N (%)	Moderate N (%)	Good N (%)
Competence	0 (0)	2 (4)	51 (96)
Ethics	0 (0)	2 (4)	51 (96)
Communication skills	0 (0)	4 (8)	49 (92)
Emotional intelligence	0 (0)	11 (21)	42 (79)

Discussion

Respondents were patients who received direct pharmaceutical services from pharmacists at pharmacies in certain periods and obtained a sample size of 53 respondents. The results showed that the pharmacist's image was in a good category. A positive image increased patients' expectations of pharmacists. The pharmacist's perceived image is formed from professional expectations, where the patients expect the pharmacist can provide confidence in the treatment obtained, provide information about drug side effects, and follow up on the patient's health problems (Sabater-Galindo *et al.*, 2017).

Professionalism is concerned with the ethics, attitudes, values, qualities and behaviours that characterise a profession and sustain public trust in the profession (International Pharmaceutical Federation, 2014). The domain of professionalism includes competence, communication skills, and empathy (Hammer *et al.*, 2003). The relationship between competence and the pharmacist profession is explained that a pharmacist must have the competence with which to practise pharmacy professionally and ethically (IAI, 2016). The lack of competence of pharmacists can be an obstacle in applying the concept of pharmacy services in their daily practice. Negative attitude felt by patients toward the extension of the pharmacist's professional role also significantly hinders the provision of clinical services by pharmacists (Puspitasari *et al.*, 2015).

Ethics is concerned with the application of ethical theory and methodology to analyse problems, practices or policies in certain fields (Darwin & Hardisman, 2014), while the pharmacist's code of ethics is one of the guidelines for limiting, regulating and carrying out his or her profession properly and correctly (Firmansyah, 2009). The ethical relationship with the pharmacist profession explains that pharmacists' actions in carrying out their profession must be based on a professional attitude so that they can maintain the dignity of pharmacists (ISFI, 2009). Table II shows that the pharmacist's image based on

professional expectations, namely competence and ethics, is mostly in the good category, both with the same value of 51 people (96%).

Positive perception of the pharmacist image is directly proportional to the patient's expectations of pharmacist professionals (competence and ethics). This expectation will affect the patient's positive reaction to the pharmacist (Sabater-Galindo *et al.*, 2017).

Patient-centred communication is essential to the professional practice of pharmacy, concerning pharmacist skills in interacting with patients to improve patient health. Patient-centred care requires the pharmacist's ability to build trusting relationships and make decisions with patients about their treatment (Beardsley *et al.*, 2012).

Table II shows that pharmacists' communication skills according to patient perceptions are mostly in the good category with a value of 49 people (92%). Effective communication is required to fulfil patient care responsibilities in pharmaceutical practice (Beardsley *et al.*, 2012). A pharmacist cannot be said to be a professional without having the ability to communicate (Sari *et al.*, 2016). Pharmacists' communication impacts not only the exchange of information but also patient behaviours such as compliance and motivation (Cavaco, 2017).

The perception of the pharmacist's image is formed from courtesy expectations (Sabater-Galindo *et al.*, 2017). Manners are related to emotional intelligence, namely someone the ability to motivate themselves, regulate moods and manage stress, empathise, and pray. Emotional intelligence affects a person's empathy and politeness in building relationships with others (Goleman, 2021). Patients view empathy and courtesy as being important in achieving quality care (Nadi *et al.*, 2016).

Table II shows that the emotional intelligence of most pharmacists is in the "good" category with a value of 42 people (79%). Pharmacists with good emotional intelligence can manage their own emotions, motivate themselves, recognise patient emotions, and build relationships with patients (Goleman, 2021). Clinical skills and relationship and therapeutic communication behaviours are key elements of quality care (Bortoli *et al.*, 2014). Patients perceive empathy to be a basic component of all therapeutic relationships. The effectiveness of empathy in therapeutic communication is described as increased patient satisfaction and compliance, decreased anxiety, and better clinical outcomes (Derksen *et al.*, 2013). Pharmacists also need these skills to manage interpersonal incidents such as interactions with angry patients. Negative interpersonal incidents can cause

psychological stress among pharmacists (Rahim & Shah, 2010).

Perceptions of patients are a direct impact on the quality of pharmaceutical services being provided to patients. There is a significant influence of pharmaceutical service quality upon perceived value, customer satisfaction and loyalty (Alhuwitat & Salem, 2017). In addition, there is a significant relationship between patient perceptions of pharmacist services, patient satisfaction and loyalty. Pharmacies must provide quality services and pay attention to patient perceptions to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty (Guhl *et al.*, 2019).

Conclusion

The image of pharmacists based on the perception of the majority of patients is in the "good" category, although there needs to be an increase in the domain of emotional intelligence.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in the research and publication of this article.

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