The Impact of COVID-19 Outbreak on Reassessing the Need for Drive Thru Community Pharmacy: Cross-Sectional Study

Reem M. Diri
Department of Pharmacy Practice, Faculty of Pharmacy, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Introduction: Community pharmacies spread all over Saudi Arabia. Customers face some of the logistic problems, such as parking availability and privacy. This study was aimed to evaluate the need, awareness, perception, and barriers of the drive-thru community pharmacy services.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted between January 1, 2020, and February 1, 2020, based on a questionnaire that was published on WhatsApp and Twitter. Results: From 1001 participants who completed the questionnaire, 54% of them are female and 70% between the age group of 18 and 30 years. The most common reason to visit the pharmacy among the participants is to purchase over-the-counter medications (36.4%). Although (86.5%) reported that there is no pharmacy provide drive-thru service in their city, 78% of participants think that this service will help all the community component. Participants believe that the drive-thru service will help in reducing car parking problems and traffic violations (83.8% and 86.3%, respectively) and will help in keeping patient privacy and (82.2%). Conclusion: Establishing community pharmacy with drive-thru service is very important to ensure a more convenient service to customers and to assist all ages, women, and special needs. Giving the recent declaration to live with coexisting COVID-19 pandemic, further procedures should be implemented to support this recommendation.

Keywords: Community pharmacy, drive-thru, Saudi vision 2030

INTRODUCTION

Since the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 infection as a pandemic outbreak in early 2020, the complete lockdown was global to limit the spread and mortality. On the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown clearance in Saudi Arabia, the high-profile precautions were applied as a major step to resume the normal life activities and to coexist with the pandemic. One of the fundamental precautions is to keep social distance, which is defined as the person-to-person distance of 1.5–2 m.

Community pharmacies spread all over Saudi Arabia. In large cities, the limited parking spots, and lack of disability parking, and the tendency to receive parking violation tickets are all lead to inconvenience to reach out to community pharmacy. In addition, some drivers may hesitate to park in narrow or difficult parking spots to avoid social embarrassment, property damage, or when kids cannot be left alone in the vehicle. Obviously, the drive-thru pharmacy service is limited an uncommon or not available in the large cities in Saudi Arabia.

Drive-thru found to lead to promote efficient and fast services for customers. In general, this service started in the U. S. A in the 1990s. The community pharmacy may need drive-thru service to solve several problems, and this service should cope with Saudi Arabia’s 2030 vision to improve customer service. [2] Abu Hammour et al. demonstrated customers’ awareness and perceptions toward drive-thru pharmacy service. They found that the drive-thru service is mostly used by busy customers. [3] However, some concerns about poor commutation between customers and pharmacists and increase the risk of medication error are expected reported complications of this system were reported. [4]

To follow the mandatory precautions to limit the outbreak of COVID-19 in terms of applying social distance requirements, it is crucial to raise the need of drive-thru community pharmacy services. To the best of our knowledge, there no study that looks in this direction.

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Address for correspondence: Dr. Reem M. Diri, Faculty of Pharmacy - Female’ Section, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah 22252, Saudi Arabia. E-mail: rdiri@kau.edu.sa

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to that need. This study aimed to evaluate the need, awareness, perception, and barriers of the drive-thru community pharmacy services.

**METHODS**

A cross-sectional study was conducted between January 1, 2020, and February 1, 2020, based on a questionnaire that was published on WhatsApp and Twitter. The study involved the customers of community pharmacy who were asked to complete an electronic questionnaire. The target sample was 1000 and this was chosen according to a confidence interval of 95% and confidence level 4.

The link of an electronic questionnaire that was designated for this purpose was sent to the target population through WhatsApp and Twitter. The semi-structured questionnaire was used for this purpose, and it includes 11 questions regarding demographic data, previous history of dealing with drive-thru services, and perception and attitude toward drive-thru services.

The primary outcome is the attitude of the community toward drive-thru services. Responses from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics through Microsoft Excel.

**RESULTS**

There are 1001 participants who completed the questionnaire; nearly half of them are females (54.9%), while more than two-thirds of participants were between 18 and 30 years old (70%) [Figure 1]. Furthermore, 60% of them from Makkah, whereas 12% from the Eastern Region, and only 7 participants have special needs [Table 1].

In general, the most common reason to visit the pharmacy among the participants is to purchase over-the-counter medications (36.4%), followed by beauty products and kids’ supplies (35%). Moreover, the absolute majority of the participants (86.5%) reported that there is no pharmacy provide drive-thru service in their city. On the other hand, 78% think that this service will help all the community categories[Table 2].

According to the advantages of drive-thru service, the absolute majority of participants believe that the presence of this service in the pharmacies will help in solving the car parking problem (83.8%), keeping patient privacy (82.2%), and reduce the traffic violations (86.3%) [Figure 2].

**DISCUSSION**

Although some regions already provide pharmacy drive-thru service, a few people know about the availability of this service in Saudi Arabia.

Our key finding is that most participants believe that the drive-thru associated with more privacy, parking availability, and fewer traffic violations. Moreover, the drive-thru pharmacy will help to provide more convenient service and a more accessible way for special needs people. There was only one study in the middle east that support this finding

| Table 1: Demographic data | \((n=1001), n (%)\) |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Gender                    |                     |
| Male                      | 452 (45.1)          |
| Female                    | 549 (54.9)          |
| Age (years)               |                     |
| 18-30                     | 703 (70.2)          |
| 30-40                     | 157 (15.7)          |
| 40-50                     | 68 (6.8)            |
| Over 50                   | 73 (7.3)            |
| City                      |                     |
| Makkah                    | 633 (63.2)          |
| The eastern region        | 128 (12.8)          |
| Riyadh                    | 104 (10.3)          |
| Medina                    | 36 (3.6)            |
| Jazan                     | 22 (2.2)            |
| Aseer                     | 26 (2.6)            |
| Al-Qassim                 | 23 (2.3)            |
| Other                     | 29 (2.9)            |

| Table 2: The attitude toward the drive-thru service | \((n=1001), n (%)\) |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Reasons to visit the pharmacy                     |                     |
| Over-the-counter medications                      | 364 (36.3)          |
| For beauty products and kids supplies              | 350 (35)            |
| Prescribe medications                             | 277 (27.7)          |
| Medical devices                                   | 10 (1)              |
| The present for drive-thru service in the city    |                     |
| Yes                                                | 135 (13.5)          |
| No                                                 | 866 (86.5)          |
| The most category will benefit from the drive-thru service |               |
| All the population                                | 781 (78)            |
| Women                                              | 29 (2.9)            |
| People with handicaps                              | 144 (14.4)          |
| Elderly people                                     | 47 (4.7)            |

Figure 1: Demographic data
and showed that drive-thru privacy will provide service associated with more privacy, parking availability, and fewer traffic violations.\[4\]

This finding supports the application of social distance as one of the mandatory precautions required by the Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia to limit the risk of COVID-19 pandemic. It will also facilitate the provision of convenient services for the customers in terms of no need for parking spots, become reachable by the disabled, and minimize the risk violation tickets. In addition, the finding of this study is supported by Saudi Arabia’s 2030 vision to improve customer service. Our limitation is the survey was only in Arabic and the more sample size will give an appropriate assessment.

**Figure 2:** The advantages of drive-thru services

![Image of Figure 2: The advantages of drive-thru services]

**Conclusion**

Giving the recent declaration to live with coexisting COVID-19 pandemic, and based on the new changes Saudi vision 2030 to ensure a better customer services, there is an essential need to support the community in terms of redesign the community pharmacy with a drive-thru track.

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**Conflicts of interest**

There are no conflicts of interest.

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