Pharmacists’ perceived barriers towards delivering their emergency roles during the COVID-19 pandemic and perceived policymakers’ responsibilities

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Abstract

Rational: In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus infectious disease as a pandemic referred to as COVID-19. As an essential service, community pharmacists have been enacting a key role in patient counseling and supply of essential medicines and protective equipment. Objectives: To investigate pharmacists’ perspectives of the role of educational institutes and professional pharmacy organizations in supporting them to take on roles during COVID-19 pandemic and to identify barriers to be able to support themselves and their patients. Methods: This descriptive mixed-method study was conducted via a cross-sectional online survey distributed to pharmacists/pharmacy students in Jordan during the COVID-19 outbreak (15-30 March 2020) using an online questionnaire, followed by an online focus group. Questionnaire items related to participants’ perspectives in being prepared for and supported in their roles during the COVID-19 pandemic and items were tested for face validity. Data were descriptively analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and triangulated with focus group findings. Results: Considering that fear and anxiety are a consequence of mass social distancing/quarantine, study participants (n=726, age=26.9 (SD=8.0) years, 71.9% females), reported needing training on mental healthcare to be able to support themselves and people during pandemics (90.2%). Most respondents agreed/strongly agreed (59.7%) with the statement around pharmacy educators/educational institutes having a key role in preparing pharmacists for practice during epidemics/pandemics, and agreed that their faculties should add a course regarding pandemic preparedness in their curriculum (89.9%). Results were similar regarding roles for the pharmaceutical associations. Focus group findings (n=7) mirrored the survey findings to a large extent. Conclusions: Most participants believed that Pharmacy Educators and pharmaceutical associations have a role in preparing them to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic through online educational workshops/webinars. Online education on mental healthcare is specifically needed.

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