

The Forsaken Fields: The State of Patient-centered Pharmaceutical care in India, and the Way Forward

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The Indian Pharmaceutical market is thriving. Today, India ranks 3rd in Pharmaceutical production in terms of volume and 14 in terms of value. India is the largest provider of generic drugs globally. India is the innovator of Covaxin, a whole-inactivated virus-based COVID-19 vaccine, and has also supplied lakhs of vaccines to several countries all over the world. The total Annual Turnover of Pharmaceuticals was Rs. 2,89,998 crore for the year 2019-2020. Total pharmaceutical exports and imports were Rs. 1,46,260 crore and Rs. 42,943 crore respectively in the year 2019-20 according to the Annual Report 2020-2021 of the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, Government of India. Due to its high production and supply of drugs and medical devices worldwide, India is called a "Pharmacy of the world".

Sadly the field of Pharmacy in India could not carve a niche in patient-centered Pharmaceutical care yet. The Community Pharmacy, Hospital Pharmacy, and Clinical Pharmacy in India are lacking their essence i.e. patient-centered care.

The history of Pharmacy in India dates back to the year 1932 when the D. Pharmacy course was introduced at the Banaras Hindu University by Mahadeva Lal Schroff. The Pharmacy Act was drafted in 1948. The Bachelor of Pharmacy course was started in 1937 and for several years the field of Pharmacy in India only focused on the formulation, manufacturing, and dispensing of drugs. Patient-centered- Pharmaceutical care i.e. Pharmacy Practice, Hospital Pharmacy, Clinical Pharmacy, etc. was started in the 1990s in India to prevent Adverse drug reactions, potential major drug-drug, drug-food, and drug-disease interactions, control antimicrobial

resistance, improve patient compliance and awareness. To improve patient-centered care further Pharm. D (Doctor of Pharmacy) was started in India in the year 2008.

Sadly even after 3 decades of the introduction of Pharmacy Practice in India, patient-centered pharmaceutical care is an alien concept to most pharmacists and the general public. Today patient-centered pharmaceutical care is badly neglected all over the country. The pharmacies are being run by non-medical people using a rented licence. The pharmacies have become merely drug dispensing stores with little to no focus on patient counselling, education, and patient awareness. There is no focus on monitoring and prevention of potential drug-drug interactions, drug-food interactions, drug-disease interactions, and Adverse drug reactions. There is an increased threat of Antimicrobial resistance, other drug-related problems, non-compliance, and reduced treatment outcomes. Community Pharmacy and Hospital Pharmacy can play a vital role in improving the health of the society by conducting patient awareness programs, educating and counselling the patients on the disease, medications, and lifestyle modifications, focusing on the importance of compliance with the drug therapy, preventing OTC dispensing of prescription drugs like antibiotics, and high-risk medications, debunking the myths related to medications and vaccines created by social media. Clinical Pharmacy activities are being carried out in very few healthcare centres due to no awareness about the role of a Clinical pharmacist in healthcare. As a result, the students are highly demotivated and do not see a future in patient-centered pharmaceutical care fields. Most Pharm. D graduates either choose Pharmaceutical Industry, Pharmacovigilance, Clinical Research, or Academia or

pursue further studies either in India or abroad. The students who do choose healthcare move into other parallels like duty medical officers, physician assistants, etc.

There is a need for Patient-centred Pharmaceutical care in India due to the widespread use of prescription drugs/non-OTC drugs as OTC, and polypharmacy which leads to Antimicrobial resistance, adverse drug reactions, increased risk of potential drug-drug interactions, drug-food interactions, drug-disease interactions, misuse of steroids, opioid drugs, etc. There is widespread non-compliance/non-adherence to the medication course in India. Many people in India don't consult doctors and follow the advice seen on social media or given by friends/relatives and even use medications prescribed to a friend/family member. Such practices can be stopped in Pharmacies by not dispensing drugs without a proper prescription and by educating patients on the risk of self-medicating. There is a lack of knowledge and awareness about the proper way of using drugs i.e. before food, or after food, frequency, duration, route of administration, correct administration techniques for inhalers, nebulizations, insulin, etc. This leads to reduced drug efficacy thus leading to failure in achieving treatment goals. Thus patient awareness, education, and counselling are very crucial.

The Way forward

There needs to be an increased focus on patient-centered pharmaceutical care services i.e. Clinical Pharmacy, Hospital Pharmacy, and Community Pharmacy. There should be periodic updating of the syllabus with the latest knowledge and better exposure to clinical activities during B. Pharmacy and Pharm. D courses with an increased focus on skills and knowledge. Patient education and counselling and patient awareness programs should be treated with utmost importance in all pharmacies. Renting of a Pharmacist's licence to others to run Pharmacies should be strictly monitored and prohibited. There needs to be an implementation of proper clinical pharmacy activities in all hospitals, nursing homes, and health care centres. The Clinical Pharmacist need to make a difference in patient care with their knowledge and skills i.e. monitoring and avoiding the potential drug-drug, drug-disease, drug-food interactions, monitoring for Adverse drug reactions, reducing the threat of antimicrobial resistance by promoting judicious use of antibiotics and by implementing antimicrobial stewardship programs, reducing non-compliance to drug therapy

by educating and counselling the patients, adjusting the drug dose according to the patient requirement, improving patient care by suggesting a better choice of drug according to the patient requirements as and when needed and counselling patients and attendants about the medications, their indications, administration method, possible side effects and the importance of compliance to treatment course.

India already excels in Pharmaceutical Industry, it is about time that the field of Pharmacy in India also carves a niche in patient-centered Pharmaceutical care. This will lead to better patient care, reduced threat of Antimicrobial resistance, opioid abuse, and other threats, and a well aware, informed, safer and healthier country at large.