



Evaluation of Pharmacists' Attitudes toward Mental Health Care, Psychiatrists and Mentally Ill Patients

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ABSTRACT

Over recent years, there has been a steady increase of pharmacists interaction with psychiatrists and mentally ill patients. Thus, this study was set out to evaluate the attitudes of pharmacists toward psychiatrists, mentally ill patients and mental health care in a neuro-psychiatric hospital. We have adapted with modification a pretested survey instrument comprised 28 statements, which the respondents rated on a five-step Likert scale. These questionnaires were distributed to all the fifty pharmacists listed, out of which 37 (74%) respondents perceived psychiatrists, hospital for mental health care and psychiatric patients in a favourable manner. The psychiatrists were viewed as reliable professionals with established expertise, and psychiatric patients were considered to be harmless similar to normal individuals. The pharmacists attitudes toward hospital for mental health care were slightly tended in the positive direction.

Keywords: Pharmacist, Psychiatrist, Mental health, Patient, Attitude.

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health care had been previously provided by non psychiatrists in medical clinics located within various secondary healthcare facilities across the north-east region of Nigeria, until in 1990s, when Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital (a tertiary healthcare facility) was established in Maiduguri Metropolitan City. Pharmacists as clinical specialists within the region used to interact only with physicians in internal medicine, paediatrics, and family practice. However, over recent years, pharmacists interaction with psychiatrics and mentally ill patients has been steadily increasing, owing to the existing collaboration between the Hospital and the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Maiduguri for training of pharmacy students. In a study of attitudes and concerns of pharmacy students toward a mental health clinical experience, Crismon and Ereshfsky¹ found that many students were apprehensive of likely physical harm from psychiatric patients compared to nursing students and less likely to view a mental health rotation as a potentially positive experience. In another study of pharmacists' attitudes toward mental healthcare system in Texas, U.S.A, Bryant et al² in an effort to understand the perceptions of pharmacists had used questions such as: How do practicing pharmacists percieve psychiatric patients, psychiartrists, and system of mental health care? Do they consider mentally ill patients weak members of society? Do they relegate psychiatrists to a discipline with unrelaible diagnostic prowess? How do hospital pharmacists view government-supported mental hospitals and the medications that are widely prescribed in these settings? The researchers found that hospital pharmacists generally have healthy, unprejudiced views toward psychiatrists and mentally ill patients but negative perception of government-supported mental hospitals and their system of mental health care. In Maiduguri, Borno State, North-East of Nigeria, there had been a paucity of data on the attitudes of pharmacists toward mental health care system generally. Thus, this study was set out to address this gap.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The survey included fifty (50) pharmacists listed by Borno State Directorate of Pharmaceutical Services, who have been working within Maiduguri Metroplitant City. We have adapted with modifications, a pretested survey instrument^{2,3} for surveying the attitudes of pharmacists. The questionnaire contained 28 Likert-type items that explored attitudes toward psychiatrists, mental illness and hospitals for mentally ill patients. Each question allowed for a graded response on five-step scale, where 1= strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree. The midpoint of the scale (3) acted as a residual category for undecided and neutral responses. The format and presentation of

questions were mixed in their sequence, content and direction of favourability. In addition to the 28 attitudinal questions, seven items addressed general demographic characteristics and posed the question, "Has anyone close to you ever sought psychiatric care for an emotional problem?" The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) Version 17⁴ was used for analysis of all data. Means and standard deviation were calculated. Each separate set of attitude item (i.e, psychiatrists, mental hospitals and mentally ill patients) constituted a reliable index. Scores on the items and indexes that exceeded the neutral midpoints in favourability were considered to indicate a positive attitude. Cronbach' α was used to test the internal correlation of the items with the total index ratings ^{5,6}.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the Responding Pharmacists (n=37)

Characteristics		Respondents (%)
Gender	Females	11 (29.7)
	Males	26 (70.3)
Age (Years)	< 30	15 (40.5)
	30- 40	12 (32.4)
	41- 50	5 (13.5)
	51- 60	5 (13.5)
	Marital Status	Married
	Single	17 (45.9)
Qualifications	BSc. Pharm	2 (5.4)
	B. Pharm	30 (81.1)
	MSc.	1 (2.7)
	PhD.	4 (10.8)
Year(s) post-qualification/ registration	0 – 5	24 (64.9)
	6 -10	2 (5.4)
	11 -15	1 (2.7)
	16 -20	2 (5.4)
	21 -25	4 (10.8)
	26 -30	1 (2.7)
	31- 35	3 (8.1)
	Present designation	Community pharmacist
Hospital pharmacist		28 (77.8)
Academic pharmacist		7 (19.4)
Years on Present Post	<5	31 (86.1)
	5 -10	3 (8.3)
	11 – 20	2 (5.6)
Has someone close to you ever sought psychiatric care for emotional problem	No	5 (45.5)
	Yes	6 (54.5)

Table 2: Attitude ratings of the responding Pharmacists toward Psychiatrists, Mental Hospitals and Mentally ill Patients (n = 37)

S/N	Statement	Mean \pm S.D. ^a	Correlation with Total Index Rating ^b
Index of Attitudes toward Psychiatrist^c			
1	If you go to two psychiatrists, you will probably get two opposite kinds of advice.	2.94 \pm 1.20	0.489
2	Psychiatrists, in general, are no better at helping mentally ill persons than a family member or friend who has real feelings for such a person.	3.59 \pm 1.18	0.424
3	Psychiatrists know a lot less about other sicknesses.	3.09 \pm 1.11	0.134
4	Psychiatrists are professionals who can reach people unreachable by others.	2.50 \pm 1.11	0.123
5	When it comes to emotional problems, family doctors probably know as much as the highest paid psychiatrists.	3.24 \pm 1.10	0.214
6	Going to psychiatrists is likely to make a person's mind more mixed up than it already is.	3.85 \pm 0.96	0.086
7	Because of their training, psychiatrists are capable of helping the human mind.	2.00 \pm 0.89	-0.158
8	Psychiatrists are needed very badly.	2.12 \pm 0.69	0.090
Index of Attitude toward Mental Hospitals^d			
1	A person has a best chance of recovery if he is hospitalized at the first sign of mental illness.	3.64 \pm 0.94	-0.060 ^f
2	A mental hospital is probably the best place for mentally sick person.	4.09 \pm 1.06	0.307 ^f
3	Our mental hospital seem more like prisons than like places where mentally ill people can be cured.	3.12 \pm 1.20	0.532
4	Mental patients are often kept in the hospital long after they are well enough to get along in the community.	3.32 \pm 1.01	0.098
5	Mental illness cannot be helped in a mental hospital.	4.32 \pm 0.68	0.575 ^f
6	I think the state mental hospitals are doing most patients some good.	3.59 \pm 0.99	0.393 ^f
7	Mental hospitals rely too much on drugs to keep their patients calm and controllable.	3.91 \pm 1.00	0.021 ^f
8	Only as a last alternative should a person who needs help be sent to a mental hospital.	3.74 \pm 1.14	0.457
9	A state mental hospital is just a holding place for people who are a bother to society.	3.38 \pm 1.18	-0.069
Index of Attitudes toward Mentally ill Patients^e			
1	Most patients in mental hospitals are not dangerous.	2.44 \pm 0.88	0.087
2	It is easy to recognize someone who once had a serious mental illness.	2.88 \pm 1.13	0.102
3	We cannot expect to understand the bizarre behavior of mental ill persons.	2.69 \pm 1.18	0.261
4	Most mentally ill persons are intelligent.	4.19 \pm 0.74	0.032

5	Most mentally ill persons haven't the ability to tell right from wrong.	3.22±1.16	0.517
6	Most mentally ill people don't care how they look.	2.53±1.22	0.547
7	Most people have mental and emotional problems	2.34±1.10	0.444
8	Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of.	2.09±0.99	-0.092
9	Mentally ill people are ruled by their emotions; normal people by their reason.	2.47±1.02	0.034
10	A mentally ill person is in no position to make decisions about even and everyday living problems.	2.94±1.29	0.398
11	There is nothing about mentally ill people that makes it easy to tell them from normal people.	3.16±1.14	-0.235

^aAttitude ratings are given as means ± S.D., where 1= strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree

^b r values

^c Range from 19.47 to 21.32, median = 20.31, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.413$ and the mean rating for total index = 23.32

^d Range from 28.91 to 30.12, median = 29.59, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.450$ and the mean rating for total index = 33.24

^e Range from 26.75 to 28.84, median = 28.25 Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.480$ and the mean rating for total index = 30.94

^f Item reversed for scaling

Attitude toward Psychiatrists

The results of this survey of pharmacists concurred with the findings of a similar survey of pharmacists². A total of 37 questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 74%. Demographic data are summarized in Table 2. About seventy-eight percent (77.8%) of the respondents were working in hospitals. Overall, the pharmacists demonstrated favourable attitudes toward psychiatrists, mental hospital and mentally ill patients. The psychiatrists were viewed in favourable terms by the surveyed pharmacists (Table 2). All of them gave positive total index ratings (i.e. , > 20), and a sizeable proportion gave total index ratings at very favourable level (≥ 30). Analysis of the individual items of the index demonstrated that pharmacists agreed with statements that portrayed the psychiatrist as a reliable professional with established and highly needed expertise. Furthermore, pharmacists usually disagreed with statements that denigrated psychiatric expertise in society (items 2, 3, 5 and 6). The mean values for these items were greater than the midpoint (3); however, none reached a level of clear agreement or disagreement (i.e. , < 2 or >4).

Attitudes toward Hospitals for Mentally Ill Patients.

The attitudes of pharmacists toward hospitals for mentally ill patients was slightly positive as measured by the total index rating, while their responses to individual items were variable (Table 2). The mean rating for the total mental hospital index was 33.24, slightly above the midpoint 29.6, reflecting a reserved but positive attitude. None of the pharmacists demonstrated strong positive attitudes (index rating > 40). This finding contrasts with the report of a study² carried out in the USA, which gave overall negative index ratings for attitudes of pharmacists toward hospital for mentally ill patients. The individual items were analyzed. Pharmacists believed mental hospitals were generally beneficial and tended to disagree with statements suggesting that mental hospitals are nothing more than habitats for people who are a bother to society, and that hospitals depend too heavily on drug therapy. However, the prevailing attitude appeared to be that mental hospitals were not always the best place for a mentally sick person. Means for all items in this index clustered between 3.12 and 4.32 with response to two items (2 and 5) reaching a level of clear disagreement (i.e., > 4).

Attitudes toward Mentally Ill Patients.

Pharmacists' attitudes toward mentally ill patients were favourable by showing disagreement with negative statements. The mean score on the rating index for attitudes toward mentally ill patients (30.94) was slightly above the midpoint (28.25). None demonstrated a negative index of less than 20. All responses to individual items were above the midpoint showing a generally positive attitude. Only item (4) demonstrated a clear trend toward disagreement (i.e., >4). These responses suggested that pharmacists viewed mentally ill patients as nonstereotypic individuals. They tended to consider patients with mental illness as basically similar to others, harmless, and without blame for their disease. This finding is similar to a study by Bryant *et al.*² but in contrast to the study by Crismon and Ereshfsky¹, which the researchers found that many pharmacy students were apprehensive of likely physical harm from psychiatric patients and less likely to view a mental health rotation as a potentially positive experience.

CONCLUSION

We found that pharmacists generally have healthy views toward psychiatrists and mentally ill patients. Majority of the responding pharmacists practiced in hospitals (psychiatric hospitals to other hospitals 1: 4), their attitudes toward psychiatric hospitals and the system of mental health care for patients were skewed in the positive direction. This may be due to these pharmacists' exposure during clinical rotation in psychiatric hospitals as students and gaining more practical experience as graduates through interaction with a variety of patients over the years.

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