

Consumers' preferences toward Prince of Songkla University Demonstration Pharmacy

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Abstract:

Consumers' preferences toward Prince of Songkla University Demonstration Pharmacy

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The consumers' preferences toward general pharmacy patronage and pharmacist consultation service activities offered by Prince of Songkla University Demonstration Pharmacy (PSDP) were determined. A convenience sample of 100 customers using PSDP was selected. For an in-store survey, subjects were asked how important were 13 general pharmacy patronage dimensions and six pharmacist consultation service activities using a unipolar importance scale. They also were asked questions about drug purchases and demographic information. The mean importance scores of all the 13 general pharmacy patronage dimensions were rated above three (of moderate importance) and all mean importance scores of the six pharmacist consultation service activities were rated above four (of considerable importance). This study has shown that all the general pharmacy patronage dimensions were considered important and needed to be provided as a basic step to build-in traffic and maintain its customers. However, fulfillment of the general pharmacy patronage alone cannot assure the success of the PSDP. In order to maintain customers' loyalty, the service aspect could not be ignored. Pharmacist consultation service activities

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are crucial parts of the success of PSDP business and would make the PSDP an ideal pharmacy setting that customers are waiting for.

Key words: Consumers' preferences, Pharmacy patronage, Pharmacist consultation service, Prince of Songkla University Demonstration Pharmacy (PDSP).

บทคัดย่อ:

วัตถุประสงค์ เพื่อศึกษาความคิดเห็นของลูกค้าต่อองค์ประกอบทั่วไปเกี่ยวกับบริการด้านยา และบริการให้คำปรึกษาเรื่องยา โดยเภสัชกร ณ สถานปฏิบัติการเภสัชกรรมชุมชน คณะเภสัชศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ โดย ผู้วิจัยได้ขอความร่วมมือจากลูกค้า 100 คน ในการตอบแบบสอบถาม แบบสอบถาม ประกอบด้วย องค์ประกอบทั่วไปเกี่ยวกับบริการด้านยา 13 ด้าน บริการให้คำปรึกษาเรื่องยา โดยเภสัชกร 6 กิจกรรม และข้อมูลทั่วไปเกี่ยวกับผู้ตอบแบบสอบถาม ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ลูกค้าให้คะแนนความสำคัญต่อองค์ประกอบทั่วไปเกี่ยวกับบริการด้านยาทั้ง 13 ด้านในระดับ "สำคัญปานกลาง" ขึ้นไป ในขณะที่บริการให้คำปรึกษาเรื่องยา โดยเภสัชกรทั้ง 6 กิจกรรมได้คะแนนในระดับ "สำคัญมาก" ขึ้นไป ผลลัพธ์ที่ได้จากการวิจัยครั้งนี้ พบว่า ลูกค้าที่มาใช้บริการ ณ สถานปฏิบัติการเภสัชกรรมชุมชน คณะเภสัชศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ ให้ความสำคัญต่อองค์ประกอบทั่วไปเกี่ยวกับบริการด้านยา ซึ่งถือได้ว่าองค์ประกอบทั้ง 13 ด้านนี้เป็นปัจจัยพื้นฐานที่สถานปฏิบัติการเภสัชกรรมชุมชน คณะเภสัชศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ จะต้องมิได้ให้บริการลูกค้า เพื่อที่จะจูงใจให้ลูกค้าเข้ามาใช้บริการ แต่อย่างไรก็ตาม องค์ประกอบทั้ง 13 ด้าน ไม่อาจจะเป็นหลักประกันได้ว่าลูกค้าจะกลับมาใช้บริการสถานปฏิบัติการเภสัชกรรมชุมชน คณะเภสัชศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ ในอนาคตอีกหรือไม่ ในการที่จะรักษาลูกค้าประจำไว้ บริการให้คำปรึกษาเรื่องยาโดยเภสัชกรจะเป็นกุญแจสำคัญที่จะทำให้สถานปฏิบัติการเภสัชกรรมชุมชน คณะเภสัชศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ ประสบความสำเร็จตามวัตถุประสงค์ที่ตั้งไว้ และยังเสริมสร้างภาพพจน์ของการเป็น "ร้านยาในอุดมคติ" ของประชาชนอีกด้วย

คำสำคัญ: องค์ประกอบทั่วไปเกี่ยวกับด้านยา, บริการเภสัชกรรม, สถานปฏิบัติการเภสัชกรรมชุมชน คณะเภสัชศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์

Introduction

Understanding what motivates consumers to select a specific pharmacy is of paramount importance in attracting new customers and retaining old ones. Defining the types of pharmacy attributes that are most important to consumers allows the pharmacy retailer to systematically maintain and improve customers' satisfaction levels.^{1-2, 7} This type of data is also useful for developing initiatives aimed at attracting customers away from the competition. The profession of pharmacy in Thailand is in the midst of a transition. In the U.S., pharmacy professionals are expanding from a traditional role as drug dispensers towards a new role as providers of direct, patient-centered care.⁴⁻⁶ This phenomenon is also true in the Thai pharmacy profession. Part of patient-centered care is pharmacist consultation service activities. Pharmacist consultation service activities have been practised in the United

States for decades; however the profession of pharmacy in Thailand has just recognized the importance of this role and started to initiate pharmacist consultation service activities into practice. Thai pharmacists must be cognizant of consumer behavior and decision-making processes to communicate and fulfill their expanded role as providers of direct, patient-centered care. A fundamental key to success is to understand patients' evaluation processes about general pharmacy patronage and pharmacist consultation service activities currently important to them. The goals of this study were 1) to determine consumers' preferences toward general pharmacy patronage for Prince of Songkla University Demonstration Pharmacy (PSDP), and 2) to determine consumers' preferences toward pharmacist consultation service offered by Prince of Songkla University Demonstration Pharmacy.

Material and methods

A scale to measure consumers' preferences toward pharmacy patronage and pharmacist consultation service was designed and evaluated according to the cross-sectional, longitudinal reviews, and the procedure for developing measures of marketing constructs proposed by Churchill.³ General pharmacy patronage was defined as the integral components of evaluative criteria used by consumers in determining pharmacy patronage for purchasing medications.⁷ Also, for this study, pharmacist consultation service was defined as a service provided directly by pharmacists who are responsible for the provision of drug therapy toward a specific consumer's need in order to achieve definite outcomes that improve a consumer's quality of life.⁸ A set of thirteen general pharmacy patronage dimensions and six pharmacist consultation service activities was examined.

In-store self-administered survey technique was used for this study. The first draft of the questionnaire was reviewed by pharmacy administration faculties and graduate students for face validity, clarity, format and overall evaluation of the instrument. Then the questionnaire was copied into A4 paper with a draft cover letter, and additional written comment about the questionnaire, and distributed to the selected 50 subjects who visited the Demonstration Pharmacy and were willing to participate in the questionnaire pretesting process. Only small changes in direction owing to some respondents confusion on how to answer the question, were required. Subsequently, for data collection, a convenience sample of 100 customers using the PSDP was invited to participate in the study. The reasons for the selected number of subjects were to assure that the selected sample was representative of the Demonstration Pharmacy. In order to complete this requirement the approximation of customers visit per day at PSDP was used for consideration. Second, to make sure that the size of the sample collected is sufficient for statistical analysis. Subjects were asked how important were the thirteen general pharmacy patronage dimensions and the six pharmacist consultation service activities to them in using the PSDP for obtaining medications using unipolar-rating scale. Then they were also asked to rank the three most important reasons from the above

general pharmacy patronage dimensions and questions about drug purchases and demographic information. The responses were coded for computer analysis. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences PC 9.0 for Windows was used for conducting all statistical tests. The mean value of the item responses was substituted for the missing responses.

Results

Respondent Demographics and Patronage Characteristics

Demographics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. The median age of respondents was 27 years, and 58% were females. About 40% of respondents rated their health as good to very good. Over 53% earned at least bachelor's degree/equivalent or higher education. Ninety-two percent of respondents thought they had enough to more than enough income to spend.

Almost 88% indicated they had ever obtained at least one prescription for themselves from the PSDP, and 48.3% did not have any type of health insurance or other health benefit program that covered their health care costs. About 40% of respondents indicated that they did not know the pharmacist at all. While 42% went to demonstration pharmacy for drug consultation and purchasing prescription medications, the other 58% went there for self-care products and refilled medications. The average number of visits in the past three months was 2.6 times

Table 1 Respondent demographics and patronage characteristics (n = 100 samples)

Characteristic	Number of respondents (%)
Self	
Yes	88 (88.0)
No	12 (12.0)
Total	100 (100.0)
Insurance	
Yes	51.7 (51.7)
No	48.3 (48.3)
Total	100 (100.0)

Table 1 (continued)

Characteristic	Number of respondents (%)
Know	
Very well	3 (3.3)
Well	11 (12.2)
Somewhat	36 (40.0)
Not at all	40 (44.4)
Total	90 (100.0)
Consult/Update	
Consult	42 (46.7)
Update	48 (53.3)
Total	90 (100.0)
Visit	
0	2 (2.3)
1-2	52 (59.8)
3-5	27 (31.0)
More than 5 times	6 (6.9)
Total	87 (100.0)
Gender	
Male	42 (42.0)
Female	58 (58.0)
Total	100 (100.0)
Age	
19 - 29	54 (55.1)
30 - 39	15 (15.3)
40 - 49	18 (18.4)
50 - 59	9 (9.2)
60 and over	2 (2.0)
Total	98 (100.0)
Health	
Poor	6 (6.1)
Fair	52 (53.1)
Good	40 (40.8)
Very Good	0 (0.0)
Total	98 (100.0)
Education	
Elementary School	5 (5.0)
High School or equal	42 (42.0)
Bachelor's Degree or higher	53 (53.0)
Total	100 (100.0)
Income	
Less than enough	8 (8.0)
Enough	72 (72.0)
More than enough	20 (20.0)
Total	100 (100.0)

Totals do not add up to 100 due to missing data

General Pharmacy Patronage Dimensions

An overview of the responses to the survey is provided in Table 2. The range of responses, the mean rating and standard deviation for each dimension are given. The mean dimension responses were on the great importance end of the importance rating scale. Twelve of the thirteen (100%) mean item responses were greater than three (considerable importance). The standard deviation of the mean dimension responses ranged from 0.72 to 1.08. Eleven mean dimension responses had standard deviations less than one.

Instances of unusable or missing responses were randomly dispersed throughout the scale portion of the questionnaire (See Table 2). A total of 5 dimension responses was affected, involving 3 of the 100 respondents. The maximum number of missing responses for any dimension was three, or not greater than 3% of the total number of responses.

Also, respondents were asked to rank the importance of those general pharmacy patronage dimensions that they considered important. The frequencies of dimensions rated most important, second most important, and third most important are summarized in Table 3.

The total importance scores and rank by total importance score for each factor are shown in Table 3. "Pharmacist professional service such as consultation" was selected as the most important factor, "Presence of pharmacist during office hours" was ranked second and "Always has my prescription medication in stock" third.

Pharmacist Consultation Service Activities

An overview of the responses to the survey is provided in Table 4. The range of responses, the mean rating and standard deviation for each pharmacist consultation service activities are given. All of the mean activities responses were on the great importance end of the scale. All of the six mean activities responses were greater than four (very important). The lowest mean score was 4.21, which was item 6: "Checks my understanding of prescription dosage directions." The standard deviation of the mean activities responses ranged from 0.71 to 0.87. All six mean activities responses had standard deviations less than one.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of general pharmacy patronage dimensions

Dimensions	Number of Response ^a (Missing)	Mean ^b ± SD	Range
1. Always has my prescription medication in stock	100 (0)	3.84 ± 0.85	1 - 5
2. Private area to speak with pharmacist about my prescriptions	100 (0)	3.62 ± 1.08	1 - 5
3. Convenient location	100 (0)	3.94 ± 0.94	1 - 5
4. Store appearance	99 (1)	3.66 ± 0.84	2 - 5
5. Prompt and attentive service	100 (0)	4.27 ± 0.75	3 - 5
6. Home delivery and emergency services	97 (3)	2.90 ± 1.04	1 - 5
7. Pharmacist professional services such as consultation	100 (0)	4.49 ± 0.67	2 - 5
8. Merchandise selection for other health care products	99 (1)	3.46 ± 0.99	1 - 5
9. Presence of the pharmacist during office hours	100 (0)	4.51 ± 0.72	2 - 5
10. Prices of prescription medications	100 (0)	3.66 ± 0.98	1 - 5
11. Pharmacist (competent, knowledgeable)	100 (0)	4.48 ± 0.66	3 - 5
12. Hours open	100 (0)	3.79 ± 0.79	1 - 5
13. Pharmacy technical staff	100 (0)	4.28 ± 0.74	2 - 5

a Totals do not add up to 100 due to missing data

b Includes insertion of aggregate mean score for missing data

Table 3 Respondents ranking specific pharmacy patronage dimensions as first, second, and third most important

Dimension	Important			Total ¹ Score	Ranking by Total Importance Score	Ranking by Mean Importance Score
	Most ^a	Second ^b	Third ^c			
Pharmacist professional services such as consultation	34	27	9	165	1	2
Presence of pharmacist during office hours	14	30	11	113	2	3
Always has my prescription medication in stock	16	7	6	68	3	8
Pharmacist (competent, knowledgeable)	9	7	20	61	4	1
Prompt and attentive service	8	8	12	52	5	4
Pharmacy technical staff	4	8	13	41	6	5
Private area to speak with pharmacist about my prescriptions	5	4	6	29	7	11
Prices of prescription medications	4	2	9	25	8	7
Convenient location	2	4	3	17	9	6
Hours open	1	1	5	10	10	9
Store appearance (layout, decor, well lit, clean)	2	1	1	9	11	10
Home delivery and emergency services	1	1	2	7	12	13
Merchandise selection for other health care products	0	0	1	1	13	12

1 Total weighed importance score were calculated by multiplying:

- a Most important by 3
- b Second most important by 2
- c Third most important by 1

Table 4 Descriptive statistic for pharmacist consultation service activities

Activities	Number of Response ^a (Missing)	Mean ^b ± SD.	Range	% Experience
1. Tells me what the prescription medicine is and what it is used for	100 (0)	4.36 ± 0.73	3 - 5	94.0
2. Tells me when and how to take my prescription medicine	100 (0)	4.26 ± 0.73	3 - 5	71.7
3. Tells me about side effects or precautions about my prescription	100 (0)	4.44 ± 0.71	2 - 5	73.0
4. Tells me of any dangers in taking prescription medicines together	100 (0)	4.30 ± 0.87	1 - 5	42.0
5. Puts extra labels on the container telling me about my prescription	100 (0)	4.46 ± 0.80	1 - 5	87.0
6. Checks my understanding of prescription dosage directions	100 (0)	4.21 ± 0.81	3 - 5	54.5

a Totals do not add up to 100 due to missing data

b Includes insertion of aggregate mean score for missing data

c % Exp stands for Percent Experience

Discussion

Respondent Demographic and Patronage Characteristics

From the observation, the major customers of PSDP could be categorized into two groups. The first group was composed of Prince of Songkla University students and staff. This group accounted for 60 percent of total customers. The second group was composed of the hospital patients and people residing near the campus. This group accounted for 40 percent. Moreover, from the resident demographic profiles, the majority of customers (58%) were female with quite high education level and thought that they had enough income to spend. These customers came to the PSDP with equally two reasons. First, they wanted counseling, and second, they came for self-service and refill medication. Specific strategies are needed to maintain these customers' loyalty such as implementation of dermatology clinic, patient profile, membership advantage, women and health information, and increased product lines in a self-service area etc.

Interestingly, about 40% of the customers thought that they did not know pharmacist at all. It might be difficult to build a relationship in the long term and to create patient-focus approach. One solution is to start up a patient profile service, membership implementation program and a pharmaceutical care service. At the same time, pharmacists must be trained in effective communication skills.

General Pharmacy Patronage

The results show that all general pharmacy patronage dimensions (except for "Home delivery and emergency services") were rated above three (considerable importance). This implies that customers expected these general patronage dimensions. In other words, it is the basic requirement that the PSDP has to provide. It is the responsibility of the pharmacy manager to fulfill their needs. It is very interesting that the top three dimensions based on mean importance score criteria, "Pharmacist. (competent, knowledgeable)", "Pharmacist professional services such as consultation" and "Presence of pharmacist during office hours" were all related to the pharmacist component. It is reassuring that customers placed their trust on the pharmacist in the decision making about their health. So, pharmacist must be reliable, competent, and always be there in response to their needs. The results suggest that the pharmacist plays a major role in building a relationship with customers and their loyalty to PSDP is ultimately based on pharmacist communication skills. However, the third most important dimension based on total importance score criteria, "Always has my prescription medication in stock", could not be ignored. This implies that customers might feel that when then came to the PSDP they should get all medications they need. Otherwise if they may feel upset, and may never return.

Pharmacist Consultation Service Activities

All the six pharmacist consultation service activities were rated above four (very important) by customers. This means that they considered them very crucial and expected them to be provided by PSDP pharmacist. However, looking more closely at the percent experience, customers received these services at different levels. There is room for improvement: the PSDP pharmacist could increase awareness of customers or show them that PSDP pharmacist tries to provide the service that customers feel is less adequately provided at present. For example, "Tell me any dangers in taking prescription medication together", only 42% of customers thought that they had ever experienced this service from PSDP.

Conclusion

This study showed that all the general pharmacy patronage dimensions were considered important and needed to be provided as a basic step to build-in traffic and maintain its customers. However, fulfillment of the general pharmacy patronage alone cannot guarantee the success of the PSDP. In order to maintain customers' loyalty, pharmacist consultation service activities cannot be ignored. Pharmacist consultation service activities would be the crucial part of success and make PSDP an ideal pharmacy setting that customers are waiting for.

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