



Achieving Patient Centeredness in Pharmacy Practice: Openness and the Pharmacist's Natural Attitude

Djenane Ramalho de Oliveira and Sarah J. Shoemaker

ABSTRACT

Objective: To present the benefits of openness for achieving patient centeredness by pharmacists, provide patient narratives from two qualitative research studies that demonstrated how patients have experienced pharmacists' traditional approach, and describe a tool with six component strategies for pharmacists to use in direct patient care.

Design: (1) Ethnographic study and (2) hermeneutic phenomenological study.

Setting: (1) Pharmaceutical care practices and (2) university.

Participants: (1) Patients, practitioners, and student pharmacists, and (2) university faculty and staff taking long-term medications for chronic diseases.

Interventions: (1) Participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and analysis of documents, and (2) unstructured, in-depth interviews.

Main Outcome Measures: (1) Observations and participant comments and (2) patient comments.

Results: Pharmacists' primary reliance on pharmacology and pharmacotherapy—without consideration of the patient as an individual—can devalue patients' personal understanding of their own situation and negatively affect care. This "natural attitude" of pharmacists, created through their preparation and education, involves their understanding of medications, focus on the product, use of counseling as the major approach with patients, and emphasis on medication adherence as a goal. Pharmacists as professionals must recognize how their natural attitude negatively affects care and work to become more patient-centered practitioners by the development of skills such as openness. Pharmacists can achieve openness by applying six strategies with patients (listen, acknowledge, wonder) and themselves and professional colleagues (recognize, question, reflect).

Conclusion: Patients want to be heard and seen as individuals with unique experiences and responses to medications. If pharmacists are intent on working with patients to ensure that their medication-related needs are met, they should grasp what it means to be patient-centered, and the six strategies for achieving openness should be applied in the daily practice of pharmacy.

Keywords: Community and ambulatory pharmacy, medication therapy management, openness, patient-centeredness, ethnography, phenomenology.

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The pharmacy profession in the 21st century continues to move toward a patient-centered practice.¹⁻³ Whether that practice is called medication therapy management, pharmaceutical care, cognitive services, or clinical pharmacy, the common denominator is the shift in focus to the patient who is taking the medication and away from the distributive aspects of preparing and delivering the medication before dispensing. This transformation might be considered the noblest role sought in pharmacy to date and as Sleath and Campbell³ stated, “A move to patient-centered care with the pharmacist assuming responsibility and liability for the client’s care is consistent with the highest calling of a profession.” However, with the movement toward this patient-centered role, pharmacists have had to change identities and learn new ways of being with their patients. These drastic changes require new knowledge and skills as well as innovative ideas to advance the profession toward this role so that patients’ individual and society’s collective medication-related needs are met by the medication expert on the health care team.^{2,3}

As Talley⁴ wrote, “Pharmacists must not only continue to develop expertise in selecting and monitoring drug therapies, they must also devote more attention to the human dimensions of medical treatment.” Pharmacy has done well to expand its pharmacologic and pharmacotherapeutic knowledge, yet this type of knowledge must be applied in a manner that acknowledges the individual patient in his social and experiential contexts. Ramalho de Oliveira⁵ determined, “To provide pharmaceutical care the practitioner must not only meet a patient’s drug-related needs and

resolve drug therapy problems, but also attend to the meanings patients ascribe to their illness as well as to their medications.”

If pharmacists really intend to improve patients’ medication experiences, they must recognize and acknowledge that individuals have unique experiences. Members of the profession must be open to learn with and from the patient and develop a holistic comprehension of patients’ understandings, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors toward health, disease, and medications. To this end, the patient-centered practitioner must develop a therapeutic relationship with patients and gain knowledge about the social, cultural, historical, and experiential contexts in which the patient encounters illness and uses medications for prevention or treatment. The pharmacist has to be willing to confront the unknown to deal with the knowledge of the person. One way patient centeredness can begin is through the recognition of the traditional approach of pharmacists, as well as the benefits that openness offers as a way of “balancing the equation” for the pharmacist in the 21st century.

Objectives

The benefits of openness for achieving patient-centeredness and strategies for achieving openness with patients are presented in this article. Patient narratives from two qualitative research studies are used to demonstrate how patients have experienced pharmacists’ traditional approach. A tool for pharmacy practitioners is presented, along with its six component strategies.

AT A GLANCE

Synopsis: By listening, acknowledging, and wondering during interactions with patients and by recognizing, questioning, and reflecting on their own actions and the assumptions of the health care system, pharmacists can achieve patient-centeredness and openness, according to this Tools for Advancing Pharmacy Practice article. These six strategies can enable pharmacists to move beyond reliance on drug and therapeutic knowledge when dealing with patients and to understand medications as patients experience them.

Analysis: *At the center of every health care encounter is the patient—a person with feelings, hopes, dreams, and wishes who is seeking care to treat or prevent diseases. Pharmacists are now developing their patient care roles under the rubric of medication therapy management by building on the principles of clinical pharmacy and pharmaceutical care that have been developed over the past half century. Patient care skills, such as openness and the establishment of a trusting relationship, are needed for pharmacists to be recognized fully as medication experts capable of providing direct patient care.*

Background

Transition in Pharmacy

Pharmacy is a longstanding profession, although there have been changes in pharmacists’ roles over time. Pharmacists have been prepared and educated in a particular manner, to meet a specific role with societal expectations, specifically on the preparation and distribution of drug product and information. Hence, the change toward a patient-oriented approach is recognized as an entirely different paradigm from the technical paradigm of dispensing.¹ As pharmacists move toward a very different role, important changes are needed in the profession. As stated by Johnson,⁶ “The focus by the profession on pharmaceutical care and patient outcomes will require major changes in skills and philosophy by current practitioners in order to survive in the future system.” Pharmacists have their customary ways of relating and reacting to patients that reflect their traditional medication-focused education, and consequently they cannot be converted into a different type of practitioner instantaneously. Sleath and Campbell³ pointed out how traditionally and historically in the profession of pharmacy, the social object was the drug and not the patient.

Therefore, pharmacy has to be cognizant of where it has been, as this may produce conflict with where it wants to go. Pharmacists need to recognize how they traditionally approach

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