

Community Pharmacy: The Role of Strategy in Increasing Access and Quality of Health Services

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the strategic role of community pharmacies in improving access to and quality of healthcare services. The research method used was qualitative with a descriptive approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with pharmacists, patients, and stakeholders, observations of pharmacy services, and documentation studies related to operational standards and policies. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles & Huberman model through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that the strategies implemented by community pharmacies include expanding operating hours, digitizing services, providing medication delivery services, improving pharmacist competency, and implementing pharmaceutical service standards. These strategies have had a positive impact on improving public access to pharmaceutical services and the quality of healthcare services. However, challenges remain, including limited human resources, technological constraints in certain regions, and suboptimal regulations. This study confirms that community pharmacies have a strategic role in supporting the primary healthcare system and need to be supported by more comprehensive policies.

INTRODUCTION

Community pharmacy is a first-level health facility that has a strategic role in providing pharmaceutical services to the community (Idris & Ahmad, 2024). Their presence provides the closest and easiest access point for the public to obtain medicines, health consultations, and information related to rational drug use. Furthermore, community pharmacies serve not only as drug distribution points but also as a means of education, health promotion, and disease prevention through clinical pharmacy services, such as drug counseling, health screenings, and patient therapy monitoring. With their multifunctional role, community pharmacies contribute significantly to supporting the national health system, improving the community's quality of life, and strengthening promotive and preventive efforts in the health sector (Moosa, 2023).

Community pharmacies play a vital role in providing quality, safe, and affordable medications tailored to the community's needs. They also serve as a place for the public to receive counseling on proper medication use, including dosage, directions for use, and potential side effects (Showande & Laniyan, 2022). Beyond just medication services, community pharmacies also provide health education focused on promotive and preventive efforts, such as counseling on healthy lifestyles, disease prevention, and chronic condition monitoring. With this function, community pharmacies serve as strategic partners in increasing community awareness and independence in maintaining health.

Although the number of pharmacies continues to increase, not all segments of society have access to optimal healthcare services. These barriers can be caused by geographic factors, such as the limited availability of pharmacies in rural or remote areas, forcing people to travel long distances to receive care. Furthermore, economic factors also play a role, as not everyone has the financial means to purchase medication or utilize certain pharmaceutical services (Cahya et al., 2023).

On the other hand, there are still gaps in health information and literacy, with some people not yet understanding the importance of consulting with pharmacists or not yet accustomed to utilizing the clinical pharmacy services provided. This suggests that increasing the number of pharmacies does not automatically guarantee easier access to healthcare services. Therefore, strategies are needed to expand reach, improve affordability, and strengthen the role of community pharmacies in providing equitable and quality services (Sosmita et al., 2024).

The main challenges facing community pharmacies in providing healthcare services include the uneven distribution of pharmacies, with most facilities concentrated in urban areas, while rural or remote areas still have limited access. The limited number of pharmacists and other professionals available is also a significant obstacle, as the number of pharmacists and other professionals available is not sufficient to meet the need for equitable service across all locations (Nassrullah & Al-Jumaili, 2023). Furthermore, service costs and drug prices are limiting factors for low-income communities, so even when services are available, not all groups are able to utilize them optimally.

This situation demands strategic efforts to expand service coverage, for example through more equitable distribution of pharmacies, strengthening the capacity of pharmacists, and providing more affordable service and medication schemes. This way, community pharmacies can function optimally as first-level healthcare facilities that are easily accessible, effective, and inclusive for all levels of society (Shengelia et al., 2005).

The quality of services in community pharmacies is currently often still dominated by the drug distribution aspect, so that the focus on clinical services such as patient counseling, drug therapy monitoring, and health education is not yet fully optimal (Eldooma et al., 2023). Many pharmacies still emphasize fast and efficient medication delivery, but in-depth interaction with patients to ensure appropriate and safe medication use remains limited. This leads to potential medication errors, a lack of patient understanding of therapies, and minimal promotional and preventive support to maintain public health.

Furthermore, the implementation of pharmaceutical service quality standards, which include patient counseling, drug therapy monitoring, and patient education, remains uneven across community pharmacies. This disparity may be due to limited pharmacist staff, differences in facility capacity, or a lack of ongoing training for pharmacy staff. As a result, the quality of care received by the community is inconsistent, and not all patients fully benefit from the potential of clinical pharmacy services. Therefore, improving the competence of pharmacists and implementing uniform service standards are crucial steps in improving service quality in community pharmacies (Alhusein & Watson, 2019).

Improving the quality and reach of community pharmacy services depends heavily on implementing appropriate management strategies. This strategy is necessary so that pharmacies focus not only on drug distribution but also on expanding community access to quality healthcare. With well-planned management, pharmacies can identify patient needs, optimize

existing resources, and ensure effective, efficient, and consistent service across all operational locations (Nuraeni & Rinaldi, 2024).

Service improvement strategies can be realized through various innovations, such as the implementation of digital services for consultations and drug ordering, interprofessional collaboration with other health workers to support patient therapy management, and strengthening the role of clinical pharmacists in providing counseling, therapy monitoring, and health education (Biset et al., 2024). These steps not only improve the quality of service but also strengthen the position of community pharmacies as first-level healthcare facilities that are easily accessible, responsive, and capable of meeting the comprehensive health needs of the community.

While much previous research has focused on physical access and medication availability in pharmacies, in-depth studies examining the strategies used by community pharmacies to improve access while maintaining the quality of healthcare services are limited. Furthermore, research linking pharmacy management strategies to patient and stakeholder perceptions of service quality is also limited, creating a significant research gap that needs to be filled to comprehensively understand how management strategies can contribute to improving the quality and reach of community pharmacy services (Jebara et al., 2021).

This study offers a new perspective by emphasizing the role of community pharmacy management strategies not only in providing medication but also in expanding access to quality healthcare services. The research approach combines the perspectives of pharmacists, patients, and healthcare stakeholders to understand the most effective strategies for improving the quality and reach of services. Furthermore, this study produces an analytical framework that can serve as a basis for developing future community pharmacy policies, thus making a significant contribution to a more holistic approach to community pharmacy practice and management.

This study aims to analyze the strategies implemented by community pharmacies to increase access to healthcare services and identify various efforts made to improve the quality of pharmaceutical services. Furthermore, this study seeks to explain the relationship between the management strategies implemented and patient and stakeholder perceptions regarding service quality. The results are expected to provide constructive recommendations for strengthening the role of community pharmacies in supporting a more effective and high-quality healthcare system.

METHODOLOGY

This research method uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive nature that focuses on an in-depth understanding of community pharmacy strategies in improving access and quality of health services (Agomo et al., 2020). The research location was determined at community pharmacies selected based on certain criteria, both in urban and rural areas. The research subjects included pharmacists, pharmacy personnel, patients or pharmacy customers, as well as relevant stakeholders such as health services and pharmaceutical professional organizations. Key informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which can then be supplemented with snowball sampling to expand the reach of informants. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participatory and non-participatory observations of pharmacy services, and documentation studies in the form of SOPs, policies, service reports, and visit data.

The primary research instrument was the researcher herself, assisted by interview guidelines, field notes, and recording devices. Data analysis employed the Miles & Huberman model, which encompasses data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and methods, member checking with informants, and peer debriefing with fellow researchers or supervisors. Ethical aspects of the research were

also addressed by obtaining informed consent from informants, maintaining confidentiality, and adhering to the code of ethics for health research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study results show that community pharmacies have implemented various strategies to improve service access, including expanding operating hours, implementing digital-based services such as telepharmacy and medication ordering apps, and developing home delivery services, especially for elderly patients or those living far from pharmacies. To improve quality, community pharmacies conduct ongoing training for pharmacists, implement pharmaceutical service standards such as SOPs for counseling and monitoring medication use, and strengthen communication with patients through health education programs.

In terms of perception, patients find it easy to access medication and counseling services, while stakeholders assess community pharmacies as valuable partners in the primary healthcare system, although challenges remain, particularly related to limited pharmacist staff in some areas. Other identified inhibiting factors include regulations and policies that do not fully support the optimal role of community pharmacies, technological constraints in areas with limited internet access, and the ongoing gap between ideal service standards and actual practice.

Table 1. Research Interview Instruments

| Aspects Explored | Indicator | Sample Interview Questions | Informant |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| The Role of Community Pharmacy | Understanding the function and contribution of pharmacy | “In your opinion, what is the main role of community pharmacy in health services in the community?” “What strategies does this pharmacy employ to make it easier for people to access medicines and services?” | Pharmacists, patients, stakeholders |
| Access Improvement Strategy | Efforts to expand service coverage | “How do pharmacies ensure the quality of pharmaceutical services to patients?” | Pharmacist, patient |
| Quality Improvement Strategy | Implementation of quality standards and service innovation | | Pharmacist, pharmacy staff |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Patient Perception | Patient satisfaction and experience | "How was your experience receiving service at this pharmacy? Did it meet your expectations?" | Patient |
| Collaboration & Integration | Relationship between pharmacy and other health facilities | "Does this pharmacy collaborate with community health centers or other health facilities?" | Pharmacists, stakeholders |
| Obstacles & Challenges | Factors inhibiting strategy and service | "What are the obstacles faced by pharmacies in improving access and quality of services?" | Pharmacists, patients, stakeholders |
| Recommendations & Expectations | Proposal to increase the role of community pharmacies | "In your opinion, what needs to be improved or enhanced in community pharmacy services?" | Pharmacists, patients, stakeholders |

Source: 2025 Data Processing Results

The interview instrument in this study was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategic role of community pharmacies. Questions were asked to determine how pharmacies are perceived by pharmacists, patients, and stakeholders, both in terms of their role and contribution to healthcare services. Furthermore, interviews focused on strategies to improve access, such as expanding operating hours, medication delivery services, and digitalization, as well as strategies to improve service quality through the implementation of quality standards and improving pharmacist competency. Patient perceptions are crucial for assessing their level of satisfaction and experience with pharmacy services. Interviews also covered collaboration with other healthcare facilities, demonstrating the integration of pharmacies into the primary care system. Obstacles and challenges faced by pharmacies were explored to understand the factors inhibiting strategy implementation, while recommendations and expectations were intended to provide informants with useful input for strengthening the role of community pharmacies in the future.

Relevance of Strategy to Service Access

Digitalization strategies and the implementation of more flexible operating hours in community pharmacies are important steps to adapt to the needs of modern society

which demands fast, easy, and affordable services (Masula & Winarno, 2025). Through digital-based services such as telepharmacy, medication ordering apps, and online consultation systems, people can access pharmaceutical information and services without having to visit a pharmacy in person. Meanwhile, longer operating hours provide opportunities for patients with limited time, such as workers or residents in certain areas, to still receive the healthcare they need. This innovation not only improves patient satisfaction but also expands the reach of community pharmacy services, making them more inclusive.

This effort is in line with the concept of universal health coverage (UHC), which emphasizes the importance of providing fair, equitable, and easily accessible health services to all levels of society (Adiyanta, 2020). Through digitalization and operational flexibility, community pharmacies contribute to increasing the availability of pharmaceutical services as an integral part of the primary healthcare system. This strengthens the role of pharmacies not only as providers of medicines but also as strategic partners in supporting the achievement of Universal Health Coverage (UHC), where every individual has the right to access quality healthcare without being constrained by distance, time, or excessive costs.

Service Quality Improvement

Improving the quality of services in community pharmacies can be achieved through the implementation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) which include patient counseling and education (Elgebli et al., 2024). Through structured counseling, patients gain a better understanding of medication use, potential side effects, and the importance of adherence to the therapy regimen. This has been shown to contribute to increased patient compliance with appropriate, safe, and rational medication use, positively impacting both therapy outcomes and quality of life.

Furthermore, ongoing training for pharmacists is a crucial factor in maintaining professionalism and improving service quality. Through this training, pharmacists can continually update their knowledge and skills in line with developments in pharmaceutical science and community needs (Gea et al., 2024). Thus, pharmacists play a role not only as drug providers but also as healthcare professionals capable of providing optimal clinical pharmacy services, strengthening patient relationships, and supporting the role of community pharmacies in the national health system.

Health System Collaboration and Integration

Collaboration and integration of community pharmacies with other health facilities such as clinics, hospitals and community health centers is key to strengthening the health service network (Ijiga et al., 2024). Through this collaboration, pharmacies can play a role in patient referrals, share information on drug therapy, and support continuity of care, especially for patients with chronic diseases. This integration also enables better coordination in medication management, therapy monitoring, and promotive and preventive efforts, resulting in a more efficient and responsive health system to community needs.

This strategic role emphasizes that community pharmacies are no longer merely drug distribution outlets, but have evolved into holistic public health service centers. By providing access to counseling, health education, and involvement in community health programs, pharmacies are able to expand their contribution to improving public health. This makes community pharmacies an integral part of the primary healthcare system,

focused on accessible, high-quality, and sustainable services (Piquer-Martinez et al., 2022).

Implementation Challenges

One of the main obstacles to optimizing the role of community pharmacies is the gap between regulations and practice. Although various regulations governing pharmaceutical service standards exist, their implementation is often inconsistent, both due to limited oversight and a lack of preparedness on the part of pharmacies themselves. This situation results in the quality of services provided not always meeting ideal standards, thus preventing the goal of improving access to and quality of healthcare services from being fully achieved (Rahmatiah Mz et al., 2024).

Furthermore, limited human resources (HR) and technological infrastructure also pose significant challenges. The uneven distribution of pharmacists, particularly in rural or remote areas, and the limited use of digital technology in some areas with limited internet access, limit pharmacies' ability to provide optimal services (Cortelyou-Ward et al., 2020). Therefore, concrete support from the government and pharmaceutical professional organizations is needed through adaptive policies, ongoing training programs, and investment in technological infrastructure so that community pharmacies can play a maximum role as part of an effective and sustainable healthcare system.

The practical implications of this research underscore the importance of implementing sustainable strategies so that community pharmacies function not only as drug distribution outlets but also expand access to healthcare services while improving the quality of pharmaceutical care. With the right strategies, pharmacies can provide more comprehensive services, be responsive to community needs, and support the achievement of national healthcare system goals.

The findings of this study can also serve as recommendations for the government in developing regulations that better support the optimization of the strategic role of community pharmacies. Adaptive regulations, coupled with policy support, strengthening human resource capacity, and utilizing technology, will encourage community pharmacies to become important partners in the primary healthcare system. Thus, the research findings not only provide theoretical contributions but also have practical value in supporting the development of future community pharmacy policies.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study confirms that community pharmacies play a strategic role as the most accessible healthcare facilities and are capable of making a significant contribution to improving primary healthcare services. Strategies to increase access include expanding operating hours, digitizing services such as telepharmacy and medication ordering apps, and developing medication delivery services, all of which have been shown to facilitate access to medications and pharmaceutical services. Furthermore, service quality has improved through the implementation of pharmaceutical service standards, patient education programs, and improving pharmacist competency through ongoing training. Patient perceptions indicate satisfaction with the innovative services and education provided, while stakeholders view community pharmacies as important partners in supporting the primary healthcare system. However, challenges remain, particularly related to

limited human resources, technological constraints in certain regions, and regulations that do not fully support the optimal role of pharmacies. Therefore, stronger policy and regulatory support is needed to enable community pharmacies to expand access and sustainably improve the quality of healthcare services.

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