Connecting the Customer Experience Concept with Pharmaceutical Care for Improving the Healthcare Status of Patients

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Abstract: Healthcare costs are rising worldwide, due to a series of factors related to increased spending on medication, aging, medication errors, adverse drug events and hospital admissions. Aging phenomenon is closely followed by an increasing burden of chronic diseases. New therapies used to treat chronic diseases have intensified the economic pressure on healthcare organizations.

Pharmacists play an important role in lowering costs by reviewing the pharmacotherapy of patients. Pharmacists are also the link between the physician and the patient, providing free medical advice without the need for an appointment. Lowering the number of inappropriately prescribed drugs reduces the risk of adverse drug events that frequently contribute to prolonged and expensive hospital admissions.

In the near future, a new approach is needed for long term results. Pharmacists will have to reshape the old concept of patient care, moving out of the negative feelings area derived from sickness and start to protect health instead of managing disease. It will result a shift from sick care to proactive healthcare experiences. Pharmacists will anticipate and solve patient's problems before they can produce a displeasure.

For maintaining a well-being state of patients is now necessarily to adopt or implement a patient centred strategy based on customer experience pillars. In Romania integrity matters most in customer experience, closely followed by personalization. In the new Era of pharmaceutical care, pharmacists will have to focus on patient experience and patient journey.

Keywords: *Patient experience, patient journey, customer experience, healthcare costs, proactive healthcare experience.*

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1. Introduction

Medication and prescription errors, followed by medication nonadherence represent major problems of both developed and developing countries, related to a high increase of healthcare costs. Adverse drug events due to the misuse of prescription drug, over the counter medication (OTCs) and food supplements lead to an increase in hospital admissions and overdose deaths. It is a known fact that pharmacists guide patients to have a rational use of medicines giving them advices regarding a healthy living and also, pharmacists redirect patients to see a physician when needed. So, pharmacists are in a unique position to limit healthcare costs due to adverse drug events, and to improve the healthcare status of patients. Pharmaceutical care is a concept more or less evolved depending on the country. Combined, patient care and customer experience approach, can represent a new weapon for helping pharmacists to lower the pressure put on the healthcare system by adverse drug events.

2. Problem Statement

It is now conceded that adverse drug events account for a great burden of disease, especially in the elderly due to their exposure to a large variety of drugs. One in ten emergency room admissions are due to adverse drug events, in case of older patients. Polypharmacy and some categories of drugs like NSAIDs and beta blockers represent causes of adverse drug events identified through systematic studies and preventable by pharmacist intervention [13]. With ageing, a series of metabolic changes and, of course, a reduced clearance rate of drugs, predispose elderly people to a higher risk of adverse drug reactions.

The term “Polypharmacy” defines a high number of drugs administrated by a patient. The higher is the number of drugs and food supplement prescribed or self-medicated, the lower will be the extent to which patients take their treatment as prescribed by their doctor/doctors. This phenomenon represents the description of low medication adherence or medication nonadherence [4].

Studies estimate that 20% to 50% in developed countries can be nonadherent with their medications. Nonadherence is linked with medication failure, progression of the disease and finally hospital admission. For example, in United States of America, 33% to 69% of emergency room visit due to adverse drug events, are related with a negative adherence [3].

Speaking about healthcare system costs of nonadherence, only in USA are spent 100 billion dollars every year [4].

3. Aims of the research

The purpose of the study is to underline the importance of pharmacists in reducing healthcare costs and improving the health status of patients, by adopting a customer experience approach based on patient centricity.

4. Research Methods

The current article represents the experts point of view regarding the involvement of customer experience concept in pharmaceutical care approach, sustained by reliable studies selected from PubMed database published between 2010 and 2020. We used in our search the following key words: “customer experience concept”, “pharmaceutical care”, “healthcare costs”, “aging phenomenon”, “patient experience”, “patient journey”, “customer experience”, “proactive healthcare experience”, “medication nonadherence”, “adverse drug events”, “polypharmacy”, “medication adherence”, “patient centricity”.

For underling the role of pharmacists in reducing healthcare costs and rising the health status of patients, we focused on both systematic reviews about medication reviews and patient care, and, on reports of CADTH.

The importance of empathy was discussed based on an exploratory interview study of medical students, and also, based on Riess H. article's, „The Science of Empathy”, where, professor Helen Riess discuss theoretic approaches of empathy development with direct bennefits for patient health.

The customer experience part of this article was created based on KPMG report about 2019 Romanian market regarding customer experience excellence.

Another meta-analysis mentioned in the current article, speaks about hospital admissions due to adverse drug reactions in the elderly, and how pharmacists can lower their number.

All articles and reports cited here, are relevant for our research and they are strengthening the need for a pharmacoeconomic study which will demonstrate that a new approach is needed for improving the health status of patients and for reducing healthcare system costs.

5. Findings

All customers want to be greeted with a smile. The smile is even more important when we speak about patients in a pharmacy, because, most of the time people arrive at the pharmacy with a problem. The large volume of work, the high number of patients, or personal problems, affect the ability

to empathize and thus the smile disappears. Dalai Lama said that "Love and compassion are a necessity, not a luxury. Without them, humanity could not survive."

5.1. Pharmaceutical care and medicine use review

A medicine use review involves a private discussion between a pharmacist and a patient, in order to improve the medication adherence and to lower the risk of adverse drug reaction due to polypharmacy [8]. Pharmacists can identify which medicines a patient may not be taking, as well as potentially inappropriate medicines [2; 7].

In United Kingdom it is estimated that the loss of the National Health Service primary care and community care prescription medicine is around 300 million pounds per year. Extended studies should be conducted for underling the economic impact pharmacists have through medicine use review pharmaceutical service in current pharmaceutical care [5].

5.2. The definition of customer experience

Customer Experience is « The way clients remember the sum of all the interactions they have with a brand, whether it is employees, channels, services, products, before, during & after purchasing, consciously or unconsciously ». Client who has a positive experience is much more willing to make a second purchase and to become a loyal customer.

People have experiences all the time: when they go shopping, when they call the customer service of a company or institution, when they go to the doctor or when they visit their pharmacist. A pleasant experience can be described as a satisfied need, and also as an easy and fast experience. Today time is the most precious currency. That's why customers want everything to happen as quickly and comfortably as possible, without having to travel.

Throughout the process the client feels safe, he has confidence that what is happening to him is good and in the end has the feeling that he deserves to pay [12].

We can say that a client had a pleasant experience, if his expectations were exceeded. A study in the Journal of Consumer Research shows that more than 50% of experiences are based on emotions. Buying decisions are also based on emotions.

Customers become loyal because they become emotionally attached to a brand and use that emotion as an anchor every time they interact with that brand.

A study conducted by Bain & Company had a surprising result: 80% of the surveyed companies believe that it offers a superior experience to its

customers. This compares to only 8% of customers who think they are getting a great customer experience [12].

5.3. Patient centric approach

Customer centricity is not just about offering great customer service. It means offering a great experience from the awareness stage, through the purchasing process and finally through the post-purchase process. It's a strategy that's based on putting our customer first, and at the core of our business. Customer centricity is concretized by working on customer experience & user experience [10].

Patient-centric approach also includes the delivery of specific education and support patients need to make decisions and participate in their own care.

In the same way, patient centricity is concretized by working on customer experience.

5.4. Empathy in Patient centric communication

The communication with the patient positively influences the experience so that he feels safe and well advised.

A recent US study of the effects of educating empathy on health professionals shows that the effect of empathic communication between physician or pharmacist with the patient has a positive effect on the patient's health by directly influencing treatment adherence [5; 9].

Empathic communication helps the patient understand and remember why it is important to follow the treatment and the instructions he received from the doctor or pharmacist. In other words, the success of therapy depends directly on the relationship created between the health professional and the patient [1; 9].

According to studies by researchers at the University of Medical Sciences in Hamburg, empathy can be educated, and medical and pharmaceutical schools should prepare students during their studies in the area of empathic communication. Basically, medical staff should have the ability to understand "humanly speaking" the patient's suffering and to treat him as if he were the closest member of his family. It is true that it is not easy to put yourself in the patient's shoes, but this can be the recipe for success for treatment efficiency and patient loyalty. The human approach is associated with many benefits for the brand, such as improving the patient's experience and loyalty and decreasing the number of complaints and adverse drug events [6; 11; 14].

6. Discussions

After ten years of research, a notorious company shows that every outstanding customer relationship has a universal set of qualities. The fundamental components of a perfect customer experience are represented by the six pillars as follows: Integrity, Expectations, Resolution, Time & Effort, Personalization, Empathy [12].

Integrity is necessarily for a great patient/customer experience. The lack of integrity, not only that affects the building process of long term customer relationships, but it can be life threatening when speaking about medication use review process.

Personalization is responsible for the perfect emotional connection. Also, personalization is important in patient centric approach because every patient has a unique health state that needs a unique approach.

Exceeding expectations of patients is about anticipating and solving patients' problems before they start to feel uncomfortable. Pharmacists will have to pass from sick care to proactive healthcare experience in order to meet patients' needs [12].

7. Conclusions

In the near future, a new approach is needed for long term results. Pharmacists will have to reshape the old concept of patient care, moving out of the negative feelings area derived from sickness and start to protect health instead of managing disease. It will result a shift from sick care to proactive healthcare experiences. Pharmacists will anticipate and solve patient's problems before they can produce a displeasure.

For maintaining a well-being state of patients is now necessarily to adopt or implement a patient centred strategy based on customer experience pillars. In Romania integrity matters most in customer experience, closely followed by personalization. In the new Era of pharmaceutical care, pharmacists will have to focus on patient experience and patient journey.

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