

# Pharmacy Service Quality for Pharmacy Customer Satisfaction, Trust, and Loyalty

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## ABSTRACT

The Indonesian government has been working towards improving the healthcare sector. The process entails supporting both private and public healthcare facilities and enacting policies that can improve the quality of services delivered to patients. The pharmacy sector plays a critical part in the delivery of health services. Pharmacists work with other healthcare practitioners, such as doctors and nurses, to assist patients in recovering from various illnesses affecting them. However, patients also expect that the pharmacists will take proactive measures to improve the quality of services given to users. The current study aimed to examine the link between pharmacy service quality and customer satisfaction, trust, and quality. The current study was done in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. The study population consisted of 350 who use pharmaceutical services in the region. The participants were randomly selected to take part in the study. The data was collected through the use of an online survey. Thematic analysis approach was used to identify major themes that could be used to answer the formulated research questions. The data collected from the respondents showed

that there was a significant and positive relationship between pharmacy service quality and the three elements of patient outcomes. In particular, the results showed that high-quality services led to increased levels of patient satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. Facilities that provide pharmacy services should strive to improve service quality to improve patient outcomes. In addition, further studies should also be done to examine the degree to which pharmacy service quality affects patient satisfaction, trust, and loyalty at the national level.

**Keywords:** Pharmacy, services, quality, satisfaction, trust, loyalty

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## INTRODUCTION

Globalization has resulted in significant changes in technological, economic, and cultural developments (Surur et al., 2015). The changes have also affected the structure and intensity of competition around the world. The impact is felt in several sectors, including the pharmacy industry. Therefore, pharmacy service providers are always looking for new ways of attracting and retaining customers. The process entails gaining the loyalty of the clients and managing relationships with them. The interaction between the customers and pharmacy service providers is critical to the success of these organizations (Surur et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2017; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Organizations require skilled individuals to be able to provide quality services. Moreover, there is a need to use innovative solutions and systems to attract customers and meet their specific needs. In some cases, the focus of the enterprises is on providing quality services to achieve the desired level of satisfaction. In other contexts, service providers embrace effective strategies for managing customer relationships to promote loyalty.

According to the World Health Organization, good pharmacy practice (GPP) entails striving to provide services that meet the needs of the service users. Besides, GPP guidelines advocate for the provision of optimal and evidence-based pharmacy services to all customers (Good Pharmacy Practice, 2012). Therefore, the priority of the pharmacist and practitioners in the sector should be helping patients to make the best use of medicine as they work towards recovering from a health condition. Besides, pharmacists need to prescribe and dispense medicine in a way that will enhance the wellbeing of the patients (Good Pharmacy Practice, 2012; Almalki, 2012; Ramez, 2012; Raposo et al., 2009). Throughout the process, the objectives of the pharmacy services should be appropriate and properly communicated to the users (Donabedian, 2005; Dubina et al., 2009; Gourley et al., 2001; Larson et al., 2001). Pharmacists also have a mission to offer medication-related care in a way that will lead

to the realization of define outcomes that can improve the patient's quality of life. The successful implementation of the GPP guidelines calls for an understanding of the concept of pharmaceutical care and quality issues. In the work of a pharmacist, the subject of quality can be examined at three different levels. They include the process, structure, and outcome of the services that are provided to patients (Gourley et al., 2001; Larson et al., 2001). The structure relates to the resources and setting where the care is provided. In addition, it encompasses the care providers who strive to offer quality services to the patients. Process, on the other hand, refers to the activities that are normally performed during service delivery. In this case, the quality will be assessed from the perspectives of societal and scientific values. Finally, the outcomes are the results of the care provided to patients (Donabedian, 2005; Dubina et al., 2009). Furthermore, outcome relates to the effect that the services have on the patients' health condition. Clinical outcome is considered to be a vital indicator of the quality services provided by healthcare practitioners. Patients' satisfaction with the services will respond to their emotional reaction to the structure and outcome of the pharmaceutical services.

Patient satisfaction has been examined previously by focusing on the subject as an outcome of the service process. In other instances, it has been regarded as an actual goal of treatment (Surur et al., 2015). The evaluation of patient satisfaction levels in the pharmacy service sector is a critical aspect of healthcare research since it can lead to the generation of new data needed to improve treatment methods and models (Ragma & Dagsi, 2017; Arsanam & Yousapronpaiboon, 2014). In addition, the studies can provide an avenue through which practitioners can identify particular areas of service that need to be changed to ensure that patients get safe and high-quality services (Lin et al., 2004; Mostafa, 2005; Zeithaml & Berry, 1996; Brown, 2013; Magill & Monti, 2010; Hall & Dornan, 1998; Chang et al., 2013). The investigations can also lead to the generation of information that can

enhance pharmacy services in a way that will optimize the health and wellbeing of patients. It is also worth stating that researchers used diverse methods to measure patient satisfaction with the services provided by pharmaceutical companies. Moreover, investigators have relied on various study designs to generate quality results relating to the subject of satisfaction with pharmacy services (Surur et al., 2015). The findings from the studies are different due to a wide range of factors, such as differences in sample population characteristics, methodology, and the variables that the researchers used to measure satisfaction. A previous study that was done in Brazil, for instance, revealed that patients were satisfied with enterprises that provided private community pharmacy services (El Hajj et al., 2011). Other studies have shown that patients considered various factors such as service quality and wait time when assessing the nature of services provided in a care facility (Mohamed & Al-Dogaither, 2004; Bamidele et al., 2011; Marquez-Peiro & Perez-Peiro, 2008). The outcome of the studies provides a basis for improving service quality and safety.

Pharmacy is a critical profession in both developed and developing countries. It ensures that customers get services that will improve their health and enable them to live a productive life. Furthermore, the pharmaceutical services help patients to improve their wellbeing so that they can continue contributing to the development and growth of the nation. In the pharmacy setting, customers get prescriptions required for their health conditions for an agreed or preset price (Surur et al., 2015). Therefore, it is imperative to examine the internal factors such as staff and tangibles and determine how they affect customer service and satisfaction (Bamidele et al., 2011; Marquez-Peiro & Perez-Peiro, 2008; Almalki, 2012; Ramez, 2012; Raposo et al., 2009). Moreover, attempts have been made to analyze how the internal environment and quality of services provided in the facility may affect the feeling of psychological comfort among the customers. Furthermore, the organization strives to improve the safety and appropriateness of the services given to patients by understanding perceptions about healthcare and building lasting relationships with clients (Bamidele et al., 2011). The process entails continuously gathering information related to the customers' perception of the properties of services provided in a hospital. In other cases, the process entails continuously communicating with the clients to understand their needs.

The pharmacy practice in Indonesia has primarily involved the use of a product-oriented strategy to practice. Some of the different practice areas in the county encompass community medicine, manufacturing establishments, health institution pharmacy, and regulatory organizations. Other stakeholders in the Indonesian pharmaceutical sector include researchers, service users, and healthcare practitioners. In recent times, there has been a strategic move towards the adoption of systems that facilitate the delivery of patient-oriented services. Furthermore, hospitals and other healthcare facilities train their employees on how to develop a positive and lasting relationship with customers to improve their satisfaction with clinical pharmacy services. Despite this being the case, only a few studies have been done on the subjects of satisfaction with pharmacy service equality.

Furthermore, minimal attention has been directed towards the understanding of the link between service quality and customer loyalty within the context of pharmacy services. Due to the scarce document on the perspectives of patients on pharmacy service quality in Indonesia, there is a need to conduct further studies on the subject. The current study was done to fill the gap and generate information that can be used to improve service quality in the Indonesian healthcare system.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) How does pharmacy service quality affect customer satisfaction levels?
- 2) What is the relationship between pharmacy service quality and customer trust?
- 3) Does the quality of pharmacy services provided by healthcare facilities affect customer loyalty?

## AIMS

The current study was done to achieve three primary objectives. The first one was to examine the possible relationship between pharmacy service quality and customer satisfaction. Second, the study was done to explore how pharmacy service quality influences customer trust. The final objective was to study the impact of service quality on customer loyalty.

## METHODS

### Study Population and Sample

The current study was done in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. The study population consisted of 350 who use pharmaceutical services in the region. The participants were randomly selected to take part in the study. The random sampling method was used to give every potential respondent an equal chance to be included in the study. Moreover, the approach enabled the researcher to reduce selection bias during the research. Participation in the current study was voluntary. The researcher sent a consent form to all the potential respondents and asked them to give their approval before proceeding with the study.

### Data Collection

Data were collected in this study through the online questionnaire method. The process entailed sending a list of questions to the participants via email. The respondents were requested to provide answers to questions about pharmacy service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. The questionnaire method was used in the present case to reduce the amount of time spent gathering data. In addition, it provided an affordable and rapid way of gathering data from the 350 participants.

### Data Analysis

All the data collected from the participants was stored in a password-protected computer. The thematic analysis method was used in the current study. The process entailed identifying the major themes in the responses provided by the participants. The main themes were used as the basis for answering the research questions.

## RESULTS

### Pharmacy Service Quality Affect Customer Satisfaction Level

The importance of service quality was highlighted by the respondents who took part in the present study. One of the respondents noted that "...whenever I go to healthcare facilities, I focus on the safety and quality of services that I get. Pharmaceutical practitioners have a significant duty when it comes to improving the wellbeing of patients. The quality of the services that they provide may determine whether an individual will recover from a healthcare problem or not. Therefore, am always concerned about quality." Another respondent in the study noted that "how can one buy services without looking at quality. Every time I visit a pharmacy, I expect to get quality service and value for my money. I do not go to pharmacies that provide substandard services." In other cases, a participant stated that "... Yes, pharmacists must learn to always offer quality services to buyers. In the current competitive world, those who provide poor services may lose out to their rivals." Similar views were experienced by a respondent who stated that ".....I am a business lady and understand the importance of service quality. I cannot accept poor pharmacy services. The pharmacists are important medical practitioners and just like nurses and doctors, they must always offer safe and quality care."

The majority of the respondents argued that there is a critical link between pharmacy service quality and the level of customer satisfaction. In one of the responses, it was indicated that "every business in the world today needed to understand and analyze the extent to which their services meet the expectations of the customers." Another respondent opined that "as a buyer, I go to a pharmacy store expecting to get the best possible care that will enable me to live a normal and healthy life. I also expect the pharmacists to provide information about the medicine that I buy from them." Another participant said that "every time I visit a pharmacy am keen to determine the kind of treatment that I get. In addition, I carefully assess the quality and nature of the products that I get. In some cases, I go to the extent of consulting with a medical doctor to see if I got the right prescription." Another respondent stated that "my level of satisfaction normally depends on the extent to which the products and services that I get meet my needs. I don't expect to get poor services yet am spending my hard-earned money on medicine. I cannot go to the same store twice if I get poor services." Another survey revealed that customers expect pharmacists to take responsibility for poor services. One of the respondents stated that "there are instances where those employees in the pharmacy stores end up providing poor services for various reasons. However, I expect them to make up for the poor services by either apologizing or giving a discount." Similar sentiments were raised by a participant who remarked that "...recently I received a formal apology from the manager of a pharmacy store after I complained about their services. Although it was late, I still believe that the manager understand that we customers are important and deserve the best."

Another vital finding in the current study related to the reaction of customers to poor pharmacy services. The

respondents stated that poor services could lead to dissatisfaction among users. In addition, the dissatisfied customers stated that they are not likely to complain directly to the pharmacists. Instead, they will not engage in repeat purchase or recommend the services to their friends and relatives. One participant stated that "...there is no way I can go back to buy from a pharmacy that offers poor quality services. Although I may not complain to the sellers, I usually look for alternatives to avoid further disappointments in the future." Another respondent noted that "some of the pharmacists are more interested in sales than the quality of services. I cannot withstand waiting in line for a long time yet there are other alternatives in the market. Instead of wasting time, I usually look for other ways of getting the services that I require." Finally, there was a respondent who argued that ".....I spend money to get pharmacy services and I always expect the best. But when I receive poor service, I must act immediately and also warn those I know about visiting such a facility. I do not do that to interfere with their business. Instead, my objective is to ensure that my friends and relatives do not waste time going to a facility where they will not be served in the right way."

### Pharmacy Service Quality and Customer Trust

The data collected through the online survey showed that there was a correlation between pharmacy service quality and customer trust. In addition, the data revealed that the level of trust among service users was dependent on the nature and quality of services that pharmacists offer in their facilities. One of the participants stated that "health is a serious issue and no one should experiment with health services. When I go to a healthcare facility, I always believe that the caregivers have to diagnose my condition and provide safe and quality care. There is no way I can go to a facility and accept substandard care. Even in the case of buying medicine from a pharmacist, I expect them to have my health in mind when offering services. I only trust caregivers who offer safe and quality services." In other cases, a respondent stated that "pharmacists should always use their skills and experience to provide safe care to patients. In the current world where we face complex health problems, a person must be careful about the quality of health services he or she uses. I do not trust easily and a pharmacists should give me a reason to trust them. If I get poor services, my trust in the caregiver will fade." In another instance, a respondent opined that "....there is no argument about that. How can you trust a caregiver who provides poor quality services? Health is a serious matter, I need to get quality service at all times. I only trust those who provide quality and safe services." From the information collected from the respondents, it is evident that the quality of services may have a far-reaching impact on the level of trust. Most respondents stated that their level of trust in pharmacists depend on the quality of services that they get.

### Pharmacy Service Quality and Customer Loyalty

Pharmacy service providers strive to improve customer loyalty to become competitive and achieve their short term and long term business goals. The responses provided by the customers who took part in the current study provided vital insights into the possible link between service quality and

customer loyalty. In this study, one of the pharmacy service users stated that "I am only loyal when my healthcare needs are met. Pharmacists are in business, and their main goal is to maximize return. As a customer, I must also take care of my health. In addition, I must only seek services from a facility that can be trusted." Another respondent argued that "I have been seeking healthcare services from the same facility for a long time. I trust the healthcare workers in the facility. At no point have I been treated badly or with negligence. Even in the pharmacy section, the kind of services I get is of high quality. The quality of the services has made me a loyal customer at the facility." Another respondent argued that "pharmacy service is just like any other business when I pay in exchange for medicine or tests that are done. The owner of the pharmacy gets money in return for the services that I get. I need to get the value for my money at all times. If that does not happen, nothing prevents me from moving to the next available store. After all, it is a free world and what I need is the best services so that I can live a healthy life." Finally, there was a respondent who argued that "I can only refer people to a pharmacy that I trust and which offers safe and quality services. It is simple logic, every client needs to get value for money. You cannot pay for poor services or advise a relative to go to a facility where they will be frustrated and denied the services that they need." Based on the responses, it can be deduced that pharmacy service quality can significantly affect the level of customer loyalty. In particular, the respondents stated that they strive to be loyal to the facilities and practitioners who offer safe and quality services at all times.

## DISCUSSION

Pharmacists play a significant role in the delivery of services to patients. They use the prescriptions by the doctors to determine the kind of medicine that the patients require. In addition, they work with health practitioners, such as nurses and laboratory technicians, during the delivery of service to patients. Patients expect to get safe and quality pharmacy services at all times. Therefore, there is a need to understand the possible link between patients' outcomes and the nature and quality of services that are provided by pharmacists. In particular, the current study was done to explore the relationship between pharmacy service quality, patient satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. The study entailed conducting a survey involving pharmacy service users in Indonesia. Three major findings were made during the current study. First, the data collected from the respondents showed that there is an important association between pharmacy service quality and customer satisfaction. In particular, the data shows that high-quality services resulted in a high level of customer satisfaction. The findings are supported by the results from previous research that have indicated that there is a significant and direct relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Rose et al., 2004; Alghamdi, 2014; Elleuch, 2008; Al-Doghaither, 2004). In addition, the study has revealed that high-quality services led to an increased level of trust among service users. Most of the respondents argued that they only trust pharmacists who are determined to help them receive the best possible care. Furthermore, the participants stated that they are likely to lose trust when they receive poor quality services that do not meet their specific

needs. The results are also supported by evidence from previous research that has indicated that the degree of customer trust is influenced by service quality (Alahmadi, 2004; Al-Doghaither et al., 2003; Alhashem et al., 2011; Barnes, 2004; Seo & Shin, 2010; Win, 2003; Oliver, 1994; Lewis & Booms, 1993; Hall & Dornan, 1988; Harris & Baron, 2004). Therefore, organizations need to work towards creating systems and processes that can be used to provide quality service at all times to win the trust of the clients (Parasuraman et al., 1994; Arasli & Ahmadeva, 2004; Zamil et al., 2012). The final major finding is the existence of a significant association between customer loyalty and pharmacy service quality. Existing literature shows that organizations are always competing to attract customers (Almalki, 2012; Ramez, 2012; Raposo et al., 2009; Zebiene, 2004). One of the avenues through which the enterprises become competitive is by offering safe and quality services. The approach has also been used as the basis for promoting repeat buying and referrals.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study was done to examine the impact of pharmacy service quality on customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. The sample population was selected from a group of customers who use pharmacy services in Indonesia. Overall, the study showed that there was a direct link between pharmacy service quality and customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. Therefore, organizations in the healthcare sector need to focus on improving the quality and safety of services that patients receive. The current study has certain limitations that should be analyzed. First, the study was based on the subjective data provided by the respondents. Therefore, it was not easy to determine whether the respondents provided reliable information and responses. In addition, there was no way to check whether the respondents were truthfully answering the survey questions. Second, the study was limited to a single province in Indonesia. Customers in different regions have unique traits that influence their purchase decisions. Elements such as employment status, educational background, and social-economic status may influence the views of customers regarding service quality. These were variables that were not taken into consideration in the current study. The third major limitation was the use of a random sampling method may have limited chances of working with respondents who understood the pharmacy service industry. However, the study provides important data that can help transform service provision in the Indonesian healthcare sector. Healthcare organizations in the country should strive to improve the quality of their pharmacy services as it is a major factor that will determine whether their clients are satisfied or not. Furthermore, the approach will enable organizations to develop trust among service users and promote repeat buying. In terms of research, the current study provides a basis for conducting further investigations on the factors that affect customer satisfaction, loyalty, and trust. Further studies should be done to empirically determine how service quality affects the three customer-related variables in the entire Indonesian healthcare sector. In addition, future studies should also examine how confounding variables such as age, background, and

socioeconomic status may mediate or moderate the relationship between service quality and customer outcomes such as trust, loyalty, and satisfaction.

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