Pharmacy practice in community pharmacies from the view of pharmacy technicians

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Background Pharmacy technicians, alongside with master degree pharmacists, are crucial members for the performance of pharmacy practice in community pharmacies. In Slovenia, the pharmacy technician education is achieved by secondary school degree. Their main duties include patient counselling at dispensing nonprescription medicines, medical devices, and other products and they can dispense prescription drugs under pharmacist supervision. Patients visiting community pharmacies expect the pharmaceutical professional staff to have thorough and in-depth knowledge. A special attention needs to be made to continuous professional development.

Purpose To evaluate the opinion of pharmacy technicians about the current state of pharmacy practice, their current and future role in community pharmacies, and their opinions about the education for the profession of the pharmacy technician.

Method Firstly, a qualitative approach was applied using focus group method. Eight pharmacy technicians, who had an important role in co-creating activities in community pharmacies, were asked to discuss relevant themes regarding the role in pharmacy practice within community pharmacies. Secondly, based on focus group results, a survey questionnaire was created and sent to all the pharmacy technicians in community pharmacies in Slovenia (383 persons). A questionnaire consisted of 13 multiple choice or five-point Likert scale questions evaluating technicians? perception of satisfaction at work, current position in pharmacy practice, current and future role in pharmacy practice, and perception of education and professional development. Demographic data was also collected.

Findings The focus group participants stated that pharmacy technicians in general are adequately qualified to do the legally allowed work, but life-long learning on individual level is necessary. Furthermore, all focus group participants expressed a very clear conviction that by upgrading the profile of the pharmacy technician the entire pharmacy team would benefit and would add the value to the pharmacy practice. According to the opinions of the focus group, the pharmacies are not uniform in relation to assigning working tasks to a master degree pharmacist or to a pharmacy technician. It appears that pharmacy technicians dispense prescription medicines without direct supervision. In total 109 pharmacy technicians responded the survey (29% response rate). The results revealed that pharmacy technicians were an important part of the pharmacy team (80% confirmation) and that they were appreciated by their colleagues (85% confirmation) or by the pharmacy visitors (90% confirmation).

Conclusion This study expressed current and future role of pharmacy technicians in pharmacy practice from their perspective. These results are helpful for the future development of pharmacy services in community pharmacies in Slovenia.