

Ethics and Responsibility in Pharmaceutical Practice: Facing Moral Dilemmas in the Modern Era

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ABSTRACT

Pharmacy practice plays a crucial role in the modern healthcare system, providing access to safe and effective medicines for the public. However, in carrying out their profession, pharmacists are often faced with complex moral dilemmas. The modern era, with technological advances and commercial pressures, further complicates ethical decision-making. This article aims to examine ethical responsibilities in pharmacy practice and how pharmacists deal with conflicts of interest between economic gain and patient interests. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this study identifies the main challenges faced by pharmacists in maintaining professional integrity while meeting regulatory demands and social expectations. The results suggest that pharmacists must adopt a balanced, value-based approach, where priority is given to patient welfare without neglecting the business aspects that are an integral part of healthcare. The discussion also explains the importance of developing ethical guidelines that are adaptive and relevant to the challenges of the digital era. The conclusion of this study is that a collaborative approach between government, professional organizations, and educational institutions can help create a stronger framework to support pharmacists in dealing with moral dilemmas in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

Pharmacy practice is one of the important pillars in the health care system that focuses on medication management and patient education (Suzanalisa, S., & Zachman, N. 2022). In this context, pharmacists have a great responsibility to ensure that every drug given is safe, effective, and in accordance with patient needs (Widjaja, G. 2019). However, the ever-evolving social and economic dynamics present new challenges, including pressure to achieve financial targets, regulatory changes, and increasing patient expectations. All of these influence the professional decisions taken by pharmacists (Hanafiah, A. 2024). However, this role is increasingly complex due to the influence of rapidly evolving social and economic dynamics. On the one hand, pharmacists face pressure to meet financial targets, both from management and market demands, which

can affect their professional independence. On the other hand, regulatory changes—including new policies related to drug distribution and supervision—require rapid adjustments that are not always easy to do (Sudirman, et al. 2024). In addition, today's patients tend to be more critical and have higher expectations, especially regarding the quality of service and access to drug information.

All these dynamics create challenges for pharmacists in maintaining a balance between professional responsibilities, ethics, and external pressures (Aliun, et al. 2024). Decisions made by pharmacists in daily practice are becoming increasingly complex, because they must consider various conflicting aspects, including patient interests, legal regulations, and business goals. This dynamic describes a situation where pharmacists must face various challenges in carrying out their duties. They must maintain a balance between professional responsibilities, ethics, and external pressures. In daily practice, decisions made by pharmacists are becoming increasingly complex because they must consider various aspects that are often conflicting (Yunus, et al. 2023). Some aspects that pharmacists must consider include patient interests, legal regulations, and business goals. Pharmacists must ensure that the decisions they make always prioritize the health and welfare of patients (Rajagukguk, et al. 2024). In addition, they must comply with various regulations and laws that govern pharmacy practice. On the other hand, pharmacists must also consider business aspects, such as operational efficiency and profitability, which may conflict with patient interests or legal regulations (Fadli, et al. 2023).

External pressures, such as company demands to achieve sales targets or introduce new products, can affect pharmacists' independence in providing objective recommendations (Yunus, et al. 2023). In some cases, pharmacists may feel compelled to prioritize certain drugs due to commercial incentives, even though the choice is not the most ideal for the patient. This creates a moral dilemma, where pharmacists must choose between following professional ethical values or meeting market and organizational demands. In addition, regulatory changes that are often rapid and complex also complicate the decision-making process. Pharmacists must understand and comply with ever-evolving legal regulations, such as provisions on prescription drug distribution, digital prescription management, or adverse drug event reporting. These regulations, although intended to protect patients, can sometimes be an administrative burden that reduces pharmacists' focus on direct interactions with patients. The evolving regulations aim to improve patient safety and regulate the distribution of drugs to be more controlled. For example, prescription drug distribution regulations ensure that drugs are only available to patients with valid prescriptions, thereby reducing the risk of misuse. Likewise, digital prescription management aims to facilitate access and improve the accuracy of medical data. In addition, the obligation to report adverse drug reactions (pharmacovigilance) helps monitor and reduce risks related to drugs circulating in the community (Hidayat, 2024). However, on the other hand, this regulation often becomes a significant administrative challenge for pharmacists. They must spend time and resources to comply with these various rules, which often require detailed documentation, periodic audits, and timely reporting. This process can take pharmacists' attention away from their main task, which is to provide education and service to patients directly (Lubis, 2024).

For example, in digital prescription management, although these systems provide significant benefits in efficiency, technical errors or lack of staff training can be barriers. In addition, reporting adverse drug reactions requires a deep understanding of pharmacovigilance and data analysis, which may not be available to all pharmacists at the practice level. As a result, some pharmacists may feel pressured to meet these requirements without sacrificing time and quality of interactions with patients. Although regulations aim to improve the quality and safety of pharmacy services, their implementation needs to be carefully considered. Government support, such as better training, integrated systems, and reduced administrative burdens, is needed to ensure that pharmacists can remain focused on their role as patient-centered healthcare providers.

The decisions made by pharmacists in these situations are highly multidimensional, involving considerations of patient welfare, legal compliance, and financial pressures (Komnas, 2021). Therefore, pharmacists need clear guidelines, ongoing ethics training, and support from professional organizations to help them face these challenges with integrity and competence. Moral dilemmas in pharmacy practice often arise when pharmacists must choose between meeting patient needs and complying with profit-oriented company policies. For example, there are situations where pharmacists are required to promote certain drugs for commercial reasons, even though the drug is not the best choice for the patient. This not only creates internal conflict, but can also damage public trust in the pharmaceutical profession (Tahu, et al. 2022). Therefore, understanding how ethics can be applied in this situation becomes a very important aspect.

Technological advances have also affected the way pharmacists work. Digitalization in prescription management and the provision of drug information has made it easier to access pharmaceutical services, but has also opened up opportunities for misuse of patient data. In addition, online platforms that offer drugs without a prescription have created new ethical challenges, where pharmacists must ensure that these services are not misused for unlawful purposes or potentially endanger public health (Sulistiyawati, 2023). Government regulations play an important role in shaping ethical pharmacy practice. However, inconsistent or unclear policies often become obstacles for pharmacists in carrying out their responsibilities. For example, some countries face challenges in regulating the sale of prescription drugs online, while on the other hand there is pressure to meet market demand. In situations like this, pharmacists must make balanced decisions between complying with regulations and serving the interests of patients. Education and training are also important factors in ensuring that pharmacists are able to deal with moral dilemmas in a professional manner. Pharmacy education programs should include training in ethics and decision-making, so that graduates can understand the complexities that exist in the world of work. In addition, ongoing training for practicing pharmacists is also needed to update their knowledge of regulations and the latest developments in the pharmaceutical field.

Research is needed because education and training are important factors in ensuring that pharmacists are able to deal with moral dilemmas in a professional manner. Pharmacy education programs should include training in ethics and decision-making, so that graduates can understand the complexities of the workplace. Ethics training helps pharmacists develop a deep understanding of the moral principles and standards of behavior that should be followed in pharmacy practice. This includes how to make ethical decisions in complex and often conflicting situations. With a strong understanding of ethics, pharmacists can be more confident in dealing with moral dilemmas and making decisions that are in the best interest of the patient. In addition, ongoing training for practicing pharmacists is also essential. The world of pharmacy is constantly evolving with new regulations, technologies, and scientific discoveries. Ongoing training helps pharmacists stay up-to-date with the latest developments in pharmacy, as well as understand and comply with applicable regulations. It also provides pharmacists with the opportunity to update their knowledge and improve their skills in dealing with ethical challenges that may arise.

With comprehensive educational programs and ongoing training, pharmacists can be better prepared to face moral dilemmas and carry out their duties in a professional and ethical manner. Research in this area is essential to identify training needs, develop

effective curricula, and evaluate the impact of educational and training programs on pharmacy practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to analyze relevant literature in discussing ethics and responsibilities in pharmacy practice (Sigit, H. 2022). This method was chosen because it allows researchers to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize previous research results. The SLR process begins with a literature search using scientific databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The keywords used include "pharmaceutical ethics," "moral dilemmas," and "pharmacist responsibilities." Studies that meet the inclusion criteria, such as relevance to the topic and publications in the last five years, are further analyzed to explore the most frequently discussed issues in the context of pharmacy ethics. Data collected from the literature are then analyzed thematically to identify key patterns in the ethical challenges faced by pharmacists. The results of this analysis form the basis for further discussion on how pharmacy practice can be improved through a better ethical approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Definition of ethics and professional responsibility in the context of pharmacy.

Ethics in the context of pharmacy refers to the moral principles and standards of behavior that pharmacists must follow in carrying out their duties. These ethics cover various aspects, such as integrity, honesty, fairness, and responsibility towards patients and society. Pharmacists must ensure that all their actions always prioritize patient welfare and comply with established professional standards. Integrity means that pharmacists must be honest and transparent in all their interactions, whether with patients, colleagues, or others. Integrity means that pharmacists must be honest and transparent in all their interactions, whether with patients, colleagues, or others (Widyana Beta Arthanti, et al. 2024). Honesty includes providing accurate and non-misleading information about medicines and treatments. Fairness means that pharmacists must treat all patients fairly and without discrimination. Responsibility to patients and society includes ensuring that all actions taken always prioritize the health and welfare of patients, and comply with all applicable regulations and professional standards (Sari, NK, & Wahjuni, E.)

By adhering to these ethical principles, pharmacists can build trust with patients and the public, and ensure that they make a positive contribution to public health and well-being. Honesty includes providing accurate and non-misleading information about medicines and treatments. Justice means that pharmacists must treat all patients fairly and without discrimination. Responsibility to patients and the public includes ensuring that all actions taken always prioritize the health and well-being of patients, and comply with all applicable regulations and professional standards (Widyana Beta Arthanti, MH, 2024).

Professional responsibility in pharmacy practice involves the pharmacist's obligation to provide safe, effective, and high-quality care to patients. This includes:

1. Provide accurate and clear information about medications to patients.
 2. Ensuring proper use of medications and avoiding errors in prescribing.
 3. Comply with regulations and laws governing pharmacy practice.
 4. Maintaining the confidentiality of patient information and respecting their privacy.
 5. Continuously improve knowledge and skills through continuing education.
- (Surasto, IW, et al. 2024).

Ethics in pharmaceutical practice are very important because they serve as a moral and professional guide for pharmacists in carrying out their duties. Here are some reasons why ethics are very important in pharmaceutical practice:

1. Protecting Patient Interests
2. Building Trust
3. Maintaining Professionalism
4. Comply with Regulations and Laws
5. Facing Moral Dilemmas
6. Improving Service Quality

(Fadhli, WM 2022).

Moral Dilemmas in Pharmacy Practice

Moral dilemmas in pharmacy practice occur when pharmacists are faced with situations where they must make difficult decisions, often considering multiple conflicting aspects (Widyana Beta Arthanti, et al. 2024). For example, pharmacists may have to choose between prescribing a more expensive but more effective drug or a cheaper but less effective drug, especially when the patient has financial constraints (Handayany, GN 2020). In addition, pharmacists must also comply with rules and policies that may not always be in accordance with the patient's needs, such as prescribing certain drugs that are not listed in the formulary but are urgently needed by the patient. Pharmacists are also often faced with situations where they must maintain the confidentiality of patient information, but on the other hand, they have an obligation to report the information to the authorities if there is an indication of drug abuse or a threat to patient safety (Habib, et al. 2024). In addition, pharmacists may face pressure from pharmaceutical companies to promote certain products, even though those products may not be the best choice for the patient. With the advancement of technology, pharmacists must also decide whether to adopt new technologies that may increase efficiency but may reduce direct interaction with patients. In research, pharmacists may face moral dilemmas related to clinical trials, such as ensuring that research participants are treated fairly and ethically (Saputra, A. 2024).

Addressing these moral dilemmas requires a thoughtful and ethical approach. Pharmacists must consider all aspects involved and make decisions that are in the best interest of the patient, while adhering to applicable professional standards and regulations. Continuing education and ethical discussions within the professional community can help pharmacists better navigate these dilemmas. It is important for pharmacists to always put the patient's health and well-being first in every decision they make. This means considering factors such as drug effectiveness, cost, and the patient's specific needs. In addition, pharmacists must comply with all applicable regulations and professional standards to ensure that their practice remains legal and ethical (Widyana Beta Arthanti, et al. 2024).

Continuing education is essential in helping pharmacists stay up-to-date with the latest developments in pharmacy and ethics. Through continuing education, pharmacists can learn new techniques, understand changes in regulations, and improve their skills in dealing with moral dilemmas. Ethical discussions within the professional community are also very beneficial. By discussing with colleagues, pharmacists can share experiences, gain new perspectives, and find solutions to complex ethical issues (Setyani, et al 2020). These discussions can also help pharmacists feel more supported and less isolated in facing ethical challenges. With a thoughtful and ethical approach, and support from

continuing education and the professional community, pharmacists can better address moral dilemmas and provide the best care for their patients. Facing these moral dilemmas requires a thoughtful and ethical approach. Pharmacists must consider all aspects involved and make decisions that are in the best interest of the patient, while still adhering to professional standards and applicable regulations. Continuing education and ethical discussions within the professional community can help pharmacists better address these dilemmas (Waliulu, 2024).

The results of the study showed that moral dilemmas in pharmacy practice cover a wide range of aspects, from conflicts of interest to pressures to meet commercial expectations. One of the main findings is that many pharmacists feel caught between meeting patient needs and complying with company policies. This situation is often exacerbated by the lack of clear ethical guidance or support from professional organizations. The lack of clear ethical guidance makes it difficult for pharmacists to make the right decisions. Without adequate guidance, pharmacists may feel confused about how best to balance their professional responsibilities to patients and their obligations to the company. In addition, the lack of support from professional organizations also worsens this situation. Professional organizations should provide the resources and support needed to help pharmacists deal with ethical dilemmas. This support can take the form of training, ethical guidance, and discussion forums where pharmacists can share experiences and find solutions together. With clear ethical guidance and adequate support from professional organizations, pharmacists will be better able to face moral dilemmas and make decisions that are in the best interest of the patient, while still complying with company policies.

It was also discussed that technological advances, while providing great benefits in improving the efficiency of pharmaceutical services, bring new challenges. For example, the digitization of patient data requires careful management to ensure privacy and security of information. In this context, pharmacists must understand their responsibilities in protecting patient data while still providing quality services. In addition, the role of regulation in supporting ethical pharmacy practice is an important highlight. Inconsistent or ineffective policies can create uncertainty for pharmacists. Therefore, collaboration between the government, professional organizations, and pharmacists is essential to create a work environment that supports ethical decision-making.

CONCLUSION

Ethics in pharmacy practice include moral principles such as integrity, honesty, fairness, and responsibility to patients and the community. Pharmacists must always put the welfare of patients first and adhere to established professional standards. Integrity means pharmacists must be honest and transparent in all their interactions. Honesty includes providing accurate information about medications and treatments. Fairness means treating all patients fairly and without discrimination. Responsibility includes ensuring the health and well-being of patients and complying with all applicable laws. The pharmacist's professional responsibility involves providing safe, effective, and high-quality care, including providing accurate information, ensuring appropriate use of medications, complying with regulations, maintaining the confidentiality of patient information, and continually improving knowledge through continuing education. Ethics are essential to pharmacy practice because they help protect patients' interests, build trust, maintain professionalism, comply with regulations, address moral dilemmas, and

improve the quality of care. Moral dilemmas occur when pharmacists must make difficult decisions while weighing multiple conflicting factors. Addressing these dilemmas requires a thoughtful and ethical approach, as well as support from continuing education and the professional community. The study found that many pharmacists feel caught between meeting patient needs and complying with company policies, which is often exacerbated by a lack of clear ethical guidance or support from professional organizations. Technological advances also bring new challenges, such as patient data management. Therefore, collaboration between government, professional organizations, and pharmacists is essential to create a work environment that supports ethical decision-making.

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