The Call for Strengthening Monitoring of Private Pharmacies and Drug Shops in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs).

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Short Report

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Abstract

Background: The Developing countries have recorded the growing trend of private pharmacies and drug shops. This paper underscores the reasons for ineffective monitoring and the importance of monitoring the services offered by the private pharmacies.

Background

To the Editor

The focus of this letter is on the importance of strengthening monitoring systems of the services offered in private pharmacies and drug shops in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs). The weak and young growing public health systems in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs) need to be strengthened. The state of health systems of being weak has resulted to low ability of the systems in serving its community. The situation has led to the thinking of using alternative means of reaching the unserved population. The means were sought to increase accessibility in terms of affordability, distance to service points and acceptability of health services among various populations. One of the means is the use of private pharmacies and drug shops for increasing the coverage and reaching more people who are in need of health services (Mhamba & Mbirigenda, 2010). Pharmacies play an important role in terms of making drugs or health products available to those in need. The specific roles of the pharmacies are performed due to the level of the particular pharmacy. The levels of pharmacies range from level 1 to level 3 but the common roles are:

- Providing counselling to sick patients
- Providing prescription of some of drugs
- Providing drugs
- Providing the contraceptives

There is reported trends showing the grooming of many private pharmacies and drug shops in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs) (Gonsalves et al., 2021). The efforts of making additional services to be available in pharmacies and drug shops in Tanzania is an example whereby contraceptives are provided in these private health facilities to cover the youth (Gonsalves et al., 2021).

Tanzania is now categorized to be among the countries with Lower middle income level, started regulating food and medicine 1930s. and the business has passed various phases. For instances, the three ordinances regulating the control of food, medicines and pharmacies. Along the phases private medical practices were burnt and later on allowed in early 1990. For the past four decades the country has witnessed rampantly increase of the business covering both urban and rural areas.

However, the monitoring of services offered by these private pharmacies and drug shops has been reported to be weak or not existing in most of LMICs, providing a room for services offered to be of low quality (Mhamba & Mbirigenda, 2010; Nsimba, 2007; Poyongo & Sangeda, 2020; Söderlund & Mendoza, 2018). For instance in Tanzania, employment of untrained pharmacists and providing the services that do not match with facility level and type, unprofessional practices and others (Gonsalves et al., 2021). In LMICs it is generally common to see the certificate of the pharmacist used and displayed in a particular pharmacy while the person is working in another place.

Why pharmacies are not adequately monitored in LMICs.

Lack of skills for conducting supportive supervision among members of the bodies (TMDA and Pharmacy Council) responsible for monitoring private pharmacies and drug shops.

Inadequate financial resources for conducting regular supportive supervisions. The TMDA and Pharmacy Council do not have adequate financial resources regular monitoring of private pharmacies and drug shops.

The effects of unregulated drug business are globally reported to be the current concern of emerged drug resistance, unaffordable services and deaths (Kirua et al., 2020; WHO, 2019). Studies reports that the most affected countries are located LMICs whereby Tanzania is included (Gonsalves et al., 2021).

The major concern of this view point is to underscore the importance of strengthening monitoring/control systems of the services offered in private pharmacies and drug shops in LMICs.

What could be done to strengthen the monitoring of private pharmacies and drug shops in LMICs.

Train staff of TMDA and Pharmacy Council on conducting supportive supervision to private pharmacies and drug shops. The aforementioned bodies are responsible for monitoring the standards of services offered in private pharmacies and drug shops. Increasing skills of the staff will increase their capacity of conducting effective supervision to the private pharmacies.

Providing adequate financial resources to TMDA and Pharmacy Council in collaboration with the district health authorities for conducting effective supportive supervisions to private pharmacies and drug shops. Alongside increasing the skills of staff of the bodies, they should be given adequate financial resources for conducting regular supervisions as part of monitoring to the private pharmacies and drug shops.

Abbreviations

LMICs Low and Middle Income Countries

WHO World Health Organization

Declarations

Ethical approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

All the data used are from the references provided.

Competing interests

There are no competing interests.

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Authors' contributions

PL conceptualized the idea, reviewed the literature and prepared the letter. RS critically reviewed the letter and approved the final letter.

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