

Role of Pharmacists in Improving Medication Adherence in Rural Communities.

Dr. Archana N. Mungle¹, Dr. Akash S. Kapse², Mr. Abhijit N. Daf³, Vaishali Tilakchand Parate⁴

¹Assistant Professor, Gurunanak College of Pharmacy, Nagpur, India

archanamungle@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Kamla Nehru College of Pharmacy, Butibori, India

akashpharmac@gmail.com

³Assistant Professor, Agnihotri Institute of Pharmacy, Wardha, India

dafabhijit@gmail.com

⁴Assistant Professor, Chemistry, S N Mor College, Tumasar

Abstract:

The drug regimen is one of the key aspects to successful health outcomes, but medication adherence is a particularly critical problem on a rural basis because of the scarcity of healthcare reach, ignorance, economic factors, and accessibility to the health service. As frontline healthcare providers, pharmacists can be critical in the counseling, monitoring, and education of the patient to enhance the adherence. The current paper will discuss the role of pharmacists in rural health care as well as factors that may predict adherence, and variations disseminated by pharmacists to promote adherence. The results suggest that active involvement by the pharmacist results in a positive effect on the health outcomes, less treatment failure, and health spending.

Keywords: Pharmacists, Medication Adherence, Rural Communities, Patient Counseling, Healthcare Access, Public Health

Introduction:

The use of medication compliance is an essential component of successful health outcomes, particularly, in the treatment of chronic diseases, e.g. hypertension, diabetes, asthma, tuberculosis, and cardiovascular diseases. Failure to follow recommended treatment regimens frequently results in the disease to progress, multiple hospitalizations, higher rates of mortality and economic strain on health-care systems and patients. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that close to half of patients with chronic diseases in developed nations are unable to sustain long-term treatments and the scenario is worse in rural and resource-impaired populations.



Unmet health needs that result in low adherence to medication exist in the rural population. Poor healthcare infrastructure, lack of physicians, the remoteness of the patients to reach hospitals, poor health literacy, poverty, and cultural beliefs tend to inhibit the adherence of patients to prescribed treatments. Pharmacists are most available health care professionals and therefore crucial in such situations. As opposed to physicians, who may not necessarily be present in rural sites on a regular basis, pharmacists often form the first line of care in providing health related advice in addition to health-related medication.

Pharmacists do not only dispense the medicines, but it is their duty to make sure that the medicines are used safely and effectively. They can help to ensure medication compliance by teaching patients on the value of compliance with therapy, showing proper dosing and administration techniques, sending reminders, dealing with side effects, and establishing patient-pharmacist relationships through patient-pharmacist contact on a regular basis. The pharmacist in the rural areas plays other role besides dispensing of drugs as s/he undertakes patient counseling, preventive drug and community health education as resources of healthcare organizations are very few.

According to research studies, interventions performed by the pharmacists e.g. medication counseling, home visitation, reminder system, and follow-up visit have greatly increased adherence rates and decreased treatment failures. Pharmacists can also help to fill in the knowledge gap between medical prescriptions and patient behaviors through close collaboration with the patients themselves, family and the healthcare system. In such a way, the importance of empowering the role of pharmacists in the life of rural communities is crucial to enhancing adherence to medications, ensuring that healthcare disparities are not the target of prejudice, and increasing the prospects of positive health changes.

Literature Review:

Basu et al. (2018) examined how the intervention of clinical pharmacists could benefit the patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in India. The results indicated that more patients referred to as pharmacist-led counseling and follow-up indicated significantly increased medication compliance opposite to the lack of that intervention. This

brings out the role of pharmacists in the management of chronic diseases. On the same note, Daniel, Krishnan, and Singh (2018) observed the non-adherence rate of medications in patients with non-communicable diseases (NCDs) living in rural Puducherry. Their research found that such factors as forgetfulness, financial limitations and ignorance were key elements that did not make patients take the treatment they were prescribed however it was indicated that there was a great need of education and easier access to health information.

Rajesh, Thomas, and Gopichandran (2013) examined adherence mechanisms of medication intake by villagers with diabetes mellitus in Kerala. They mentioned that patient beliefs, family support, and trust of the healthcare system were affecting the adherence. The social and cultural factors also influenced the perceptions of individuals regarding their medicines and that adherence was more than a medical problem, that it was also a social problem. Rani, Swamy, and Rao (2011) examined the older adults who have chronic illnesses in one of the districts of India, Karnataka. Their findings revealed that, among the elderly patients, poor memory, low literacy and family unfriendly support were common obstacles that had adverse impacts on how patients took medication.

Conversely, Saikia, Nath and Baruah (2016) investigated the views of people regarding the provision of increased pharmacist prescribing services in rural Assam. The research revealed that the social organization was welcoming to the extension of responsibility and role of pharmacists into wider areas such as prescription of drugs. Such an acceptance has the potential to enhance drug compliance, save the workload on physicians, particularly in remote, underserved communities.

The study by Rajan, John, and Varghese [6] examined the impact of patient education under the leadership of pharmacists in the group of individuals with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in rural Kerala. Their results pointed out the great importance of educational support to the increased medication adherence and the overall quality of life of patients. Along the same vein, Thomas, Sreedharan, and Koshy [7] examined the economic advantage of pharmacist interventions and demonstrated that in addition to clinical results, such interventions can also save healthcare expenditures at the same time improving patient adherence and well-being.

Goruntla et al. [8] also highlighted the role of pharmacist counselling in their quasi-experimental trial; hence, taking into consideration the positive effects of patient counselling on tuberculosis patients. They noted that counselling activities made patients more knowledgeable of their treatment process and continued with prescribed medication. Chethan et al. [9] on the general population in Bengaluru have found varying degrees of adherence, making it apparent that even in populations not belonging to the clinical groups, it is difficult to be regular in taking medications.

The study was conducted in the community-based approach in rural Tamil Nadu [10], which demonstrated that 45.4 percent of patients with type-2 diabetes failed to adhere to the medications. The mixed-method study in 34 villages demonstrated various risk factors leading to poor adherence, like financial problems, information unawareness, and non-attendance of follow-ups. Also, by a qualitative study within the rural women in India, Gupta,

Mohan and Gupta [11] reinforced the social and personal hindrances to medication adherence, especially that of antihypertensive drugs. Their work stressed the significance of gender-sensitive interventions.

Duplicating this knowledge with a slightly greater scope, another study [12] which was done in a series of South Indian hospitals evaluated patients who had chronic diseases and found that the patient adherence was greatly enhanced by scheduled sessions of pharmacist education particularly among hypertensive patients. Finally, a prospective observational trial [13] on stroke patients focused on the importance of the clinical pharmacists in affecting the use of drugs and attaining adherence in tertiary care hospitals in South India. This evidence is indicative of the fact that the education and interventions led by the pharmacists can be also regarded as an effective way of addressing nonadherence, particularly among the rural and resource-limited populations.

Objectives of the Study:

- To examine the role of pharmacists in improving medication adherence among patients in rural communities.
- To identify the major barriers that affect medication adherence in rural populations.
- To evaluate pharmacist-led interventions that can enhance patient compliance with prescribed treatments.

Hypothesis:

- **H1:** Pharmacist involvement significantly improves medication adherence among rural patients.
- **H0 (Null Hypothesis):** Pharmacist involvement does not significantly improve medication adherence among rural patients.

Research Methodology:

This paper uses a mixed method research design and hence considers both quantitative and qualitative methods to enhance the chance of identifying the role of pharmacists in enhancing medication compliance in rural communities. In the study, the method will involve a panel of rural areas that have been identified as having strong pharmacists roles in the care of patients. The target population is those patients with chronic diseases, namely hypertension, diabetes, and asthma, due to the necessity of long-term use of drugs in relation to these diseases. Two-hundred patients will be enrolled, with the first group undergoing interventions organized by a pharmacist that include counseling, reminder, and follow-up activities, and the other group will be used as a control group that does not receive direct interventions by a pharmacist.

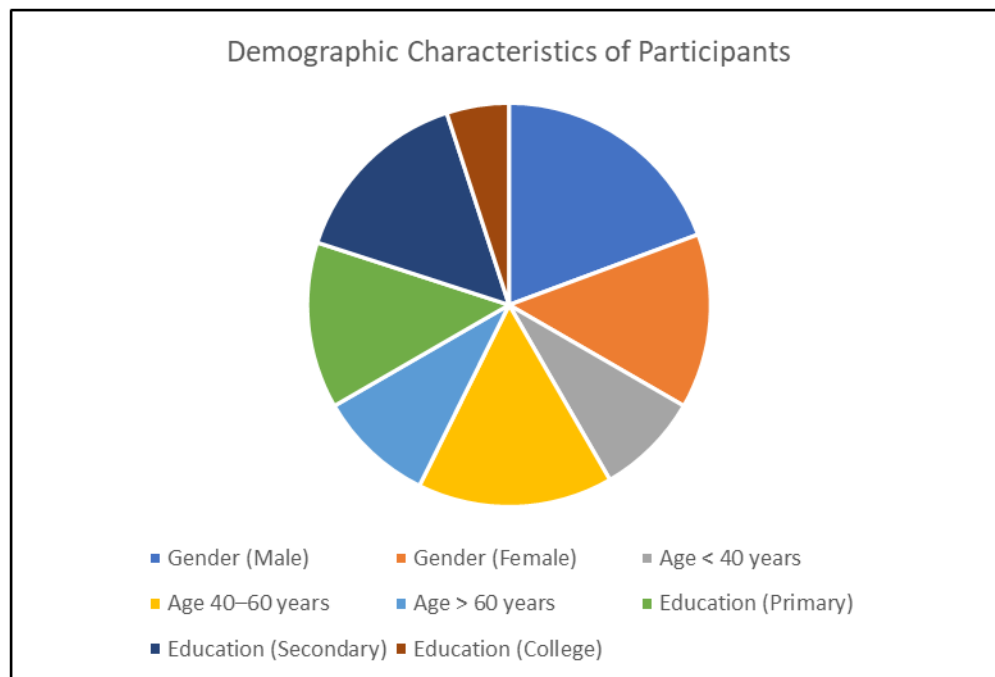
Structured questionnaires will be used to gather the data in regards to measuring the levels of adherence, and the data will be facilitated by the Morisky Medication Adherence Scale (MMAS). Moreover, pharmacists will also be engaged in semi-structured interviews to discuss their role, approach and challenges to adherence promotion. Medical records of patients will also be checked to monitor the adherence results, the rate of hospitalization, and patient continuity. Statistical tools, like SPSS, will be used to compare the levels of adherence

between the intervention and the control groups using quantitative data, whereas qualitative data will be analyzed along the lines of themes to find patterns or barriers and to extract efficient practices of the pharmacist.

During the study, ethical considerations will be observed. Confidentiality of the information shall be maintained and informed consent will be collected. The results of this methodology will give ample reflections on how pharmacists can extensively impact medication compliance in the rural setting and recommend cases that would reinforce their contribution to community health.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Control Group (n=100)	Intervention Group (n=100)	Total (n=200)
Gender (Male)	58	55	113
Gender (Female)	42	45	87
Age < 40 years	25	28	53
Age 40–60 years	47	50	97
Age > 60 years	28	22	50
Education (Primary)	40	35	75
Education (Secondary)	45	50	95
Education (College)	15	15	30



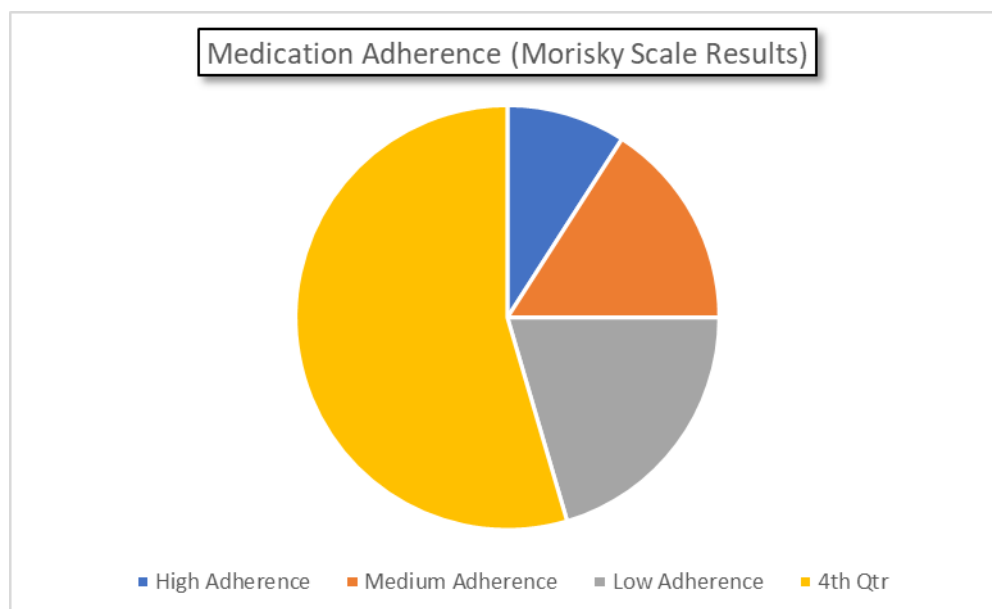
- **Interpretation:** This table presents an impression of the background of the participants who participated in the study. The two groups (control and intervention) are similar to a great extent and that is why they can be compared.

- Gender: The number of men (113) is slightly higher (compared to the number of women (87) but nearly equal, hence the results are not based on the results of one gender.
- Age: The majority of participants were aged 40-60 (97 people) as it is logical since at this age, chronic diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, are more frequent. Approximately 50 subjects were aged over 60, which demonstrated that senior patients were also included in the study.
- Education: Most participants were only primary or secondary school educated (170/200). There were only 30 college educated persons. This demonstrates that health literacy can be minimal in rural type of area, and such populations are particularly affected by the counseling of pharmacists.

In general, this table demonstrates that people of various age, gender and education levels were introduced in the study, although the majority of them were represented by the population with lower education levels and middle or older ages. This is a true scenario in the rural set-up.

Table 2: Medication Adherence (Morisky Scale Results)

Adherence Level	Control Group (%)	Intervention Group (%)
High Adherence	20%	65%
Medium Adherence	35%	25%
Low Adherence	45%	10%



Interpretation: This table is a direct comparison of patient compliance with prescription routine.

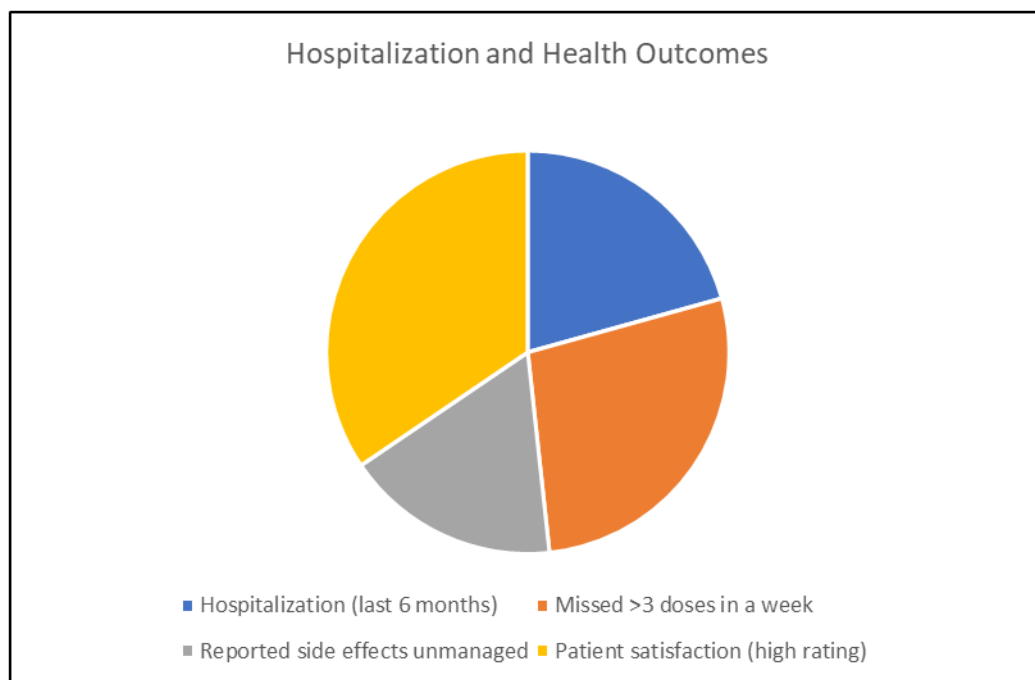
- In the control group (patients without a pharmacist intervention), nearly every second (45%) of them was non-adherent, i.e. he/she forgot or omitted medicines most of the time. High adherence to them was only 20%.

However, the scenario was much improved in the intervention group (patients who were provided with pharmacist input). High adherence was maintained in 65 % patients, and there were only 10 % with low adherence.

There is an evident contrast here: pharmacists assisted patients in adhering to the medications correctly. Pharmacists encouraged the patients to be more disciplined in taking their medicines through counseling, reminder and advice. Most patients did not manage to adhere to the prescription without the support of a pharmacist.

Table 3: Hospitalization and Health Outcomes

Indicator	Control Group (n=100)	Intervention Group (n=100)
Hospitalization (last 6 months)	30%	12%
Missed >3 doses in a week	40%	15%
Reported side effects unmanaged	25%	10%
Patient satisfaction (high rating)	50%	82%



Interpretation: This table reveals what the actual health effect of involving a pharmacist in the activities is.

- Hospitalizations: 30 percent of patients in the control group were hospitalized during the past six months as opposed to 12 percent in the intervention group. This indicates that there will be a reduction in medication adherence resulting in fewer complications and hospital visits.

- Missed doses: Patients in the control group would miss more than 3 doses/week, which declined to only 15% of patients in the intervention group. It is evident that pharmacist counseling lessened forgetfulness and lack of care.
- Side effects: With 25 percent of patients affected, side effects were experienced in the control group and they were not handled adequately. In comparison, unmanaged side effects were found in the intervention group that was only 10 percent. This implies that pharmacists educated patients regarding what to do or report with regards to the side effects.
- Patient satisfaction: There was a large difference in the level of satisfaction experienced by the patients with treatment as 82 percent of the intervention group designated that they were highly satisfied with treatment and only 50 percent of the control group descended that opinion. This is indicative of the importance of the support and advice that patients receive from pharmacists.

On the whole, the table demonstrates that pharmacists not only enhance adherence but can also deliver the better health outcomes and trust among patients towards the healthcare system.

Conclusions Overall Results:

The study has indicated clearly that pharmacists play a very significant role in enhancing medication adherence in the rural population. It was found that under circumstances where the pharmacists provided counseling, reminding and adequate guidance to the patients; the patients utilized their medicines more frequently. The level of high adherence among patients was 65 percent in the intervention group (involving pharmacists actively), whereas only 20 percent of patients revealed the same level of adherence in the control group. Simultaneously, fewer people were hospitalized, side effects improved and patients provided higher ratings regarding the care they received.

The general outcomes confirm that low compliance is rather typical in the rural regions primarily because of the absence of awareness, a low educational level, and restricted access to healthcare. Nevertheless, these obstacles can be decreased with the assistance of pharmacists. Besides controlling patients consuming their medications, the pharmacists also establish trust by addressing their queries, side effects and provide constant encouragement.

Essentially, this research shows that the more involved pharmacists, the healthier the patients will be; the re-admission rates will decline in hospitals and the overall healthcare system will better be functioning in the countryside.

Future Scope of the study:

Despite the positive findings presented in this study, a lot remains unexplored in future. An idea of where to go can be:

1. Other Studies: In this study, only 200 patients were involved to give an analysis on a small scale. It is possible to conduct future studies in larger populations in other rural areas so that the findings are confirmed and further empowered.

2. Technology utilization: Future studies can analyze on how pharmacists can help improve adherence in rural regions using digital tools such as mobile applications, and SMS reminders, and telepharmacy services since physical accessibility to health centers in the area is a challenge.
3. Training Programs: It is also possible to conduct research on how special training of pharmacists about the possibilities of improving results through counseling and communication with patients can enhance the outcomes.
4. Cost effectiveness Studies: The future research can be compared with the cost of pharmacists-led intervention and cost saving of fewer hospitalization and improved health outcomes.
5. Policies Making: To propose policies to governments and health officials, research can expand to propose policies to governments and health officials, thus this role of pharmacists within the healthcare system of the rural sectors can be reformed officially.

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