

Title: Co-Creation of Standard Operating Procedures for Managing Community Pharmacies in Periods of Public Health Emergencies in Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: Community pharmacists (CPs) provided essential services during the COVID-19 lockdowns, albeit, in the absence of any existing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Objectives: The study objectives were to explore CPs' innovative strategies in managing operational challenges caused by COVID-19 pandemic; and to co-create SOPs from the strategies.

Methods: A co-creation process was utilised in extracting qualitative and quantitative data for the design of SOPs with CPs' inputs and evaluation. The challenges and innovative strategies employed in managing pharmacies were explored from twenty-one audio-recorded in-depth interviews with CPs across the study states (Lagos, Osun and Oyo), and 376 CPs who responded to a semi-structured questionnaire pre-tested in Ondo state. Eleven SOPs were developed from the best practices reported and were field-tested with 19 CPs in Ile-Ife for two weeks during the last lockdown period. Inputs from their use, evaluation and recommendations were used to refine and create two additional SOPs. The thirteen SOPs were shared on the national WhatsApp platform of the Association of Community Pharmacists of Nigeria (ACPN) who evaluated and made inputs. Qualitative data were analysed thematically while quantitative data were analysed with IBM SPSS Version 25.0. Ethics approval and informed consent were obtained before commencing the study.

Results: Across the three study states, 376 CPs comprising 61.1% males and 38.9% females with mean age of 40.25±11.62 years, reported challenges (97.6%) including high logistics costs (84.5%) and difficulty commuting to the pharmacy (57.5%). Provision of expanded services such as management of chronic conditions (43.7%), and carpooling (32.2%) were amongst strategies employed to manage the reported challenges to their operations. Interviewees expressed need for SOPs. The SOPs developed included SOPs on; Getting to the Office, Work Preparation, Handling Payments, Expanded services, and Compliance to Infection Control Protocols. A total of 132 ACPN members completed the SOP evaluation form, 62.9% confirmed non-existence of SOPs, and 88.6% were willing to support the SOPs adoption.

Conclusion: Community pharmacists implemented innovative strategies which have been co-designed into thirteen sets of standard operating procedures for management of pharmacies during any future pandemic. Pharmacy policymakers' engagement for adoption of the SOPs among ACPN members is recommended.

Keywords: Standard Operating Procedures, COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacy operations, Association of Community Pharmacists of Nigeria, pandemic, co-creation.