

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Assessment of Romanian Customers' Level of Satisfaction with Pharmaceutical Providers

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The aim of the current study is to assess the level of satisfaction towards pharmaceutical services among Romanian customers. Moreover, we were interested in building the socio-demographical profile of a Romanian satisfied customer. The study has a transversal design and uses a quantitative approach. Data was collected at the national level in June 2012 by using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) and resulted in 1,478 valid questionnaires. Descriptive statistics were performed in order to properly present the sample of interest according to socio-demographic characteristics, as well as general attitudes towards pharmaceutical market. According to our analysis, only half of the respondents have a favorite pharmacy (50,4%). Regarding their level of satisfaction, the majority of respondents (53%) declared themselves as being quite satisfied with the pharmacy that they usually collaborate with, whereas 42% of respondents are very satisfied with their favorite pharmacies. According to our analysis, the most satisfied customer has the following socio-demographic characteristics: female (N=351), aged between 56 and 70 years old (N=259), having high school as the highest level of education (N=184), living in an urban area (N=343), having a monthly income of 501-1000 RON (N=217), married (N=396), having no chronic disease (N=312), having a family composed of two members (N=185). Customer's satisfaction represents a personal evaluation on the pharmaceutical services and providers and is an essential part of the quality of health care. Therefore, it is vital to assess the customer's expectation and satisfaction in order to ensure the success of the pharmaceutical company.

Keywords: customer, satisfaction, pharmacy, services.

Received: 25 June 2015 / Accepted: 03 August 2015

Introduction

Customer satisfaction has become an essential variable regardless of the type of market we may refer to. A good health status is essential to the quality of life. Moreover, the quality of health services is the starting point for improving each individual's health status [1]. Quality management aims to reach continuous quality improvement of health services by including quality planning, quality control, quality assurance, and quality improvement [2].

In the context of pharmaceutical market, customer-provider interaction is influenced by both parties' expectations. Therefore, a higher degree of customer satisfaction regarding pharmaceutical services provided by a companies may lead to a stronger relationship [3]. Customer's satisfaction represents a personal evaluation on the pharmaceutical services and providers and is an essential part of the quality of health care [4]. Therefore, it is vital to assess the customer's expectation and satisfaction in order to ensure the success of the pharmaceutical company [5].

Satisfaction refers to both the realities related to care that each customer interacts with and expectations and preferences towards products and services [6]. According to recent studies the most important factors that ensure a high level of quality of pharmaceutical services include communication, convenience and courtesy [7]. A high

level of satisfaction leads to stability in accessing the products and services of the same pharmaceutical provider [8].

On the European level, the evolution in the number of pharmacies differs from case to case; in the case of Romania, it is placed 5th among European countries regarding the number of pharmacies [9]. Therefore, taking into account the great competition on the national level, pharmaceutical providers need to establish strategies that take into account their customers' satisfaction and expectations in order to gain a higher number of clients and ensure stability within relationships already established. The objectives of a pharmaceutical company should be primarily driven by customer satisfaction, systematic measurement of customer satisfaction, targeting customers with competitive advantage and rapid response to competitors' actions [10].

Similar studies were conducted in various countries by applying different instruments validated to measure patients' expectations and satisfaction on medicine retail outlet services [11].

The aim of the current study is to assess the level of satisfaction towards pharmaceutical services among Romanian customers. Moreover, we were interested in building the socio-demographical profile of a Romanian satisfied customer.

Methods

The study has a transversal design and uses a quantitative approach. Data was collected at the national level in June 2012. Data collection was performed through Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) and resulted

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in 1,478 valid questionnaires. The sample considered for analysis consisted of all 1,478 respondents, all of them aged 18 or older. The sample we used was multi-layered, probabilistic, representative of the adult population in Romania. Descriptive statistics were performed in order to properly present the sample of interest according to socio-demographic characteristics, as well as general attitudes towards pharmaceutical market. Cross tabulation was performed in order to identify the socio-demographic characteristics that have the highest influence on the level of satisfaction. Furthermore, we specifically aimed to assess respondents' level of satisfaction with pharmaceutical services and products. Statistical analysis was performed by using SPSS Software version 21.0

When referring to the variables that were included in the analysis, we were interested in the individual behaviors related to pharmaceutical services. More exactly, we included data regarding the situation of having a favorite pharmacy provider, the level of satisfaction towards the most visited pharmacy, factors that would determine our respondents to seek the services of a different pharmacy. Another variable concerning loyalty towards a specific pharmacy referred to the possession of fidelity cards for one of the major pharmacy providers from Romania. The respondents' level of satisfaction was also assessed specifically in connection to the relationship established between them and pharmacists. In this context, we were interested in finding out whether Romanian customers have a favorite pharmacist whose advice they seek continuously and if so, how their relationship can be described. More generally, our analysis included the level of trust that customers experienced in relation to pharmacists.

Socio-demographic variables analyzed included: age, sex, education level, ethnicity, residency, monthly income, marital status, number of family members, presence of a chronic disease.

Results

According to our analysis, only half of the respondents have a favorite pharmacy (50,4%). The idea of having a favorite pharmacy is confirmed by the fact that in 96% of these cases people frequently collaborate with their favorite pharmacies instead of selecting a different one.

Regarding their level of satisfaction, the majority of respondents (53%) declared themselves as being quite satisfied with the pharmacy that they usually collaborate with, whereas 42% of respondents are very satisfied with their favorite pharmacies. From the total number of respondents, only 4% felt quite or very dissatisfied with their pharmacies.

Asked what would be the variables that may determine them in ending the current collaboration with their favorite pharmacy and selecting a new one, the most common factors related to high costs (21%) and lack of desired products (18%). Moreover, within the same context, almost half of the respondents (41%) stated that there would be no reason for selecting a different pharmacy. (figure 1)

Regarding the possession of fidelity cards for one of the major pharmacy providers from Romania, half of our sample holds such fidelity cards (49%).

The relationship established between customers and pharmacists is generally based on a high level of trust (61%), whereas approximately 18% of the respondents stated their lack of trust towards pharmacists. This idea of trust is confirmed by a high percentage of respondents (39%) who stated that they have a favorite pharmacist who they constantly contact in order to receive pharmaceutical advices. Furthermore, these respondents perceive information received from their favorite pharmacies as being quite trustful (51%) or even very trustful (45%). Still, more than half of our respondents feel the need of having more conversations with the pharmacists on specific topics: information about the use of products (96%), cheaper drug options (77%), health issues (79%), drug side effects (88%).

According to our analysis, the most satisfied customer has the following socio-demographic characteristics: female (N=351 or 23.7%), aged between 56 and 70 years old (N=259 or 17.5%), having high school as the highest level of education (N=184 or 12.4%), living in an urban area (N=343 or 23.2%), having a monthly income of 501-1000 RON (N=217 or 14.7%), married (N=396 or 26.9%), having no chronic disease (N=312 or 21.1%), having a family composed of two members (N=185 or 12.5%). (Table I-IV)

We tested the hypothesis of certain demographic drive of such behavior and calculated Lambda and Gamma parameters for the above mentioned demographic parameters. The results tell us there is no such cross-relation for sure in all cases, but income level (p>0.05) although both Lambda and Gamma did not show such a relation (Table V).

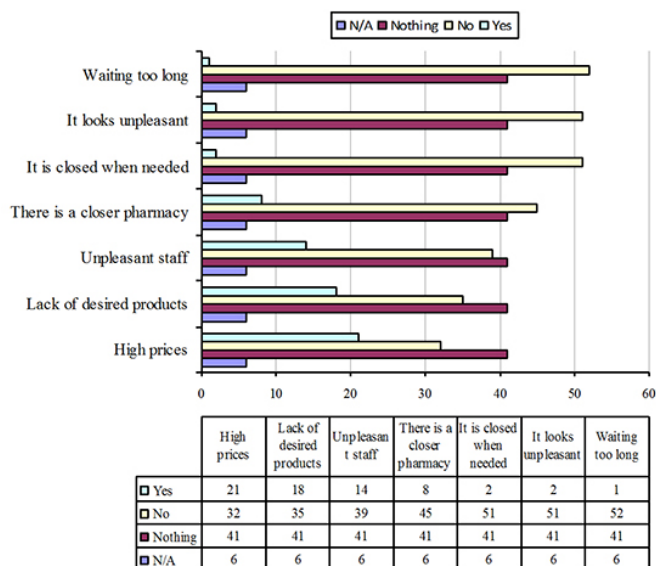


Fig. 1. Variables that may determine respondents in selecting a different pharmacy
Values expressed in %

Table I. Level of satisfaction towards pharmaceutical providers in relation to age category

| Age category | Very satisfied | Quite satisfied | Quite unsatisfied | Very unsatisfied | N/A |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|-----|
| 18-25 | 36 | 87 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 26-40 | 76 | 112 | 9 | 0 | 2 |
| 41-55 | 123 | 203 | 14 | 3 | 4 |
| 56-70 | 259 | 275 | 22 | 10 | 5 |
| over 71 | 127 | 102 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| Total | 621 | 779 | 48 | 17 | 13 |

Table II. Level of satisfaction towards pharmaceutical providers in relation to education level

| Education level | Very satisfied | Quite satisfied | Quite unsatisfied | Very unsatisfied | N/A |
|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|-----|
| no education | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| primary school | 21 | 14 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| secondary school | 81 | 71 | 9 | 4 | 0 |
| professional school | 112 | 121 | 13 | 3 | 1 |
| high school | 184 | 260 | 16 | 3 | 3 |
| post-secondary school | 85 | 104 | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| college | 4 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| university | 111 | 158 | 5 | 3 | 6 |
| post graduate | 21 | 40 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 621 | 779 | 48 | 17 | 13 |

Table III. Level of satisfaction towards pharmaceutical providers in relation to monthly income

| Monthly income | Very satisfied | Quite satisfied | Quite unsatisfied | Very unsatisfied | N/A |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|-----|
| no income | 58 | 85 | 7 | 0 | 4 |
| 1-500 RON | 88 | 114 | 11 | 2 | 0 |
| 501-1000 RON | 217 | 239 | 9 | 11 | 4 |
| 1001-1500 RON | 140 | 156 | 5 | 1 | 2 |
| 1501-2000 RON | 52 | 62 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 2001-2500 RON | 11 | 19 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| over 2500 RON | 21 | 50 | 11 | 3 | 0 |
| N/A | 34 | 54 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 621 | 779 | 48 | 17 | 13 |

Table IV. Level of satisfaction towards pharmaceutical providers in relation to marital status

| Marital status | Very satisfied | Quite satisfied | Quite unsatisfied | Very unsatisfied | N/A |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|-----|
| single | 65 | 116 | 6 | 0 | 1 |
| living with someone, but not married | 6 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| married | 396 | 534 | 37 | 14 | 10 |
| divorced | 16 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| widow(er) | 120 | 79 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| Not declared | 16 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Count | 619 | 776 | 48 | 17 | 13 |

Table V. Lambda and Gamma parameters

| Demographic factor | Lambda, demographic dependent | | | Gamma | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|------------|--------|-------------------|------------|
| | Value | Asymp. Std. Error | Approx.Sig | Value | Asymp. Std. Error | Approx.Sig |
| Gender | 0.039 | 0.040 | 0.335 | -0.139 | 0.048 | 0.040 |
| Age | 0.000 | 0.000 | | -0.153 | 0.036 | 0.000 |
| Education | 0.013 | 0.008 | 0.125 | 0.071 | 0.035 | 0.042 |
| Medium of residence | 0.027 | 0.010 | 0.009 | 0.017 | 0.049 | 0.723 |
| Income level | 0.002 | 0.005 | 0.705 | 0.015 | 0.034 | 0.656 |
| Marital status | 0.000 | 0.000 | | -0.178 | 0.045 | 0.000 |
| Health status | 0.026 | 0.013 | 0.041 | 0.043 | 0.047 | 0.355 |
| Family size | 0.000 | 0.000 | | -0.053 | 0.035 | 0.126 |

Discussion

The assessment of the level of satisfaction of customers with their health care services has become an important issue globally, therefore, there is a continuous research support in measuring the quality of care from customers' view [12].

Out of the 1478 respondents, half of them (53%) declared themselves as being satisfied with the pharmaceutical providers. This may be a promising result for pharmaceutical companies, but in the same time it may contribute to the establishment of a continuous improvement of services in order to increase the customers' level of satisfaction. This study showed that the overall satisfaction of the respondents was lower than the satisfaction rate of USA (85% satisfaction level) [13].

The results suggest a high level of trust towards pharmacists, confirmed by a high percentage of respondents (39%) who stated that they have a favorite pharmacist who they constantly contact in order to receive pharmaceutical advices. Similar results were registered in Jordan (63%) and Northern Ireland (67%), where customers would not hesitate to ask the pharmacist for advice regarding the treatment of minor illnesses [14, 15]. Still, more than half of our respondents feel the need of having more conversations with the pharmacists on specific topics: information about the use of products (96%), cheaper drug options (77%), health issues (79%), drug side effects (88%). In contrast, an Ethiopian study revealed that over 70% of the respondents agreed that the pharmacy professionals took time to listen and answer their questions. Taking this into account, future directions may include the development of standards of practice to meet customers' expectations.

The level of "very satisfied" is 42% while "quite satisfied" is 52.7%. This is also driven by the level of competition in the market. Romania is one of the most crowded market in terms of number of pharmacies and thus the cost of switch is reduced significantly. This gives a big power to the customer and the more the sophistication the more the demands are.

In practice there is a significant difference between "very satisfied" and "quite satisfied" and this is somehow normal compare with other markets given the level of dynamism in the market. Many pharmacies change location and new

players get in the market, so the customer is not only having many choices but is also given many novelties by new openings and new offerings. Given the socio-demographic characteristics, the higher the age, the more satisfied. Somehow that is normal as younger people are more curious and are looking for higher standards toward any service. It seems that women are in a higher proportion “very satisfied” than men. This is quite surprising given that most of purchases in pharmacy are made by women and we might expect for women to be more knowledgeable and thus more critical. As expected the higher the education level the less satisfied because they have more sophisticated demands.

The sources for in-satisfaction are mostly related with the pharmaceutical service - lack of desired products (N=18), unpleasant staff (N=14) or proximity (N=8). However, the most important reason to switch the pharmacy provider remain the price (N=21).

Conclusion

The data collected and analyzed within the current study showed a relatively high level of customer's satisfaction towards pharmaceutical providers. Furthermore, the relationship established between the customer and the pharmacist is based on a high level of trust. Regarding the profile of the most satisfied customer it has the following socio-demographic characteristics: female, aged between 56 and 70 years old, having high school as the highest level of education, living in an urban area, having a monthly income of 501-1000 RON, married, having no chronic disease, having a family composed of two members.

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