

## Assessment of Challenges Encountered by Community Pharmacists and Dispensing Staff when Dispensing Medicines

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Community pharmacists (CPs) and dispensing staff are considered as the primary healthcare services most approachable by patients out of all healthcare professionals due to their easy access and widespread availability without the need of scheduled appointments. This research study was conducted to assess the barriers encountered by CPs and dispensing staff when dispensing medicines and to address the measures suggested by them to overcome these challenges. A cross-sectional study was conducted among community pharmacists in Dehiwala, Boralesgamuwa, Nugegoda, Piliyandala, and Maharagama community pharmacies from October 24, 2023, to February 11, 2024. Self-administered questionnaires and structured interviews were conducted to collect data from study participants. All responses for the questionnaires were analyzed statistically using SPSS Version 25 and interviews were thematically analyzed. Out of 161 total participants, 82 took part only in the questionnaire and 79 out of 161 respondents took part in both parts: the questionnaire and the structured interview. Based on the responses for the structured interview questions, a thematic mind map was developed consisting of 3 major themes, 7 subthemes (and 14 codes). The study revealed that patient, environmental and prescription related barriers are prevalent in the community pharmacy practice, which could impact the quality of pharmaceutical services provided. Therefore, these barriers need to be overcome to enable more active participation of community pharmacists and dispensing staff in public health activities by consulting stakeholders, assessing the situation, considering alternatives and taking-action. In Sri Lanka, the majority of these challenges can be resolved through fundamental changes to the healthcare system.

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