



A study on pharmacies within the concept of ethical dilemma and analysis of ethical dilemmas encountered in pharmacies

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Abstract

In this study, it is aimed to make a detailed analysis of ethical dilemmas encountered in pharmacies. Our study is a descriptive study. Its universe consists of all 226 pharmacies located in the center of Malatya. The questionnaire, consisting of 14 questions, we prepared originally, was conducted for pharmacists who volunteered to participate face-to-face and online for two months in 2022. The analysis of the survey data was made with the 'SPSS' program and the level of significance was taken as $p < 0.05$ for comparison tests. When the answers were examined, it was stated that almost all participants knew the definition of ethics, but when it came to ethical dilemma, 30.30% (n: 50) of undergraduate graduates and 15% (n: 3) of master's graduates stated that they did not know the concept of ethical dilemma. Considering the answers of the pharmacists participating in the survey, although there are not big differences from time to time, as the level of education increases, the increase in sensitivity to ethical issues and the level of discipline in professional practices is remarkable.

Keywords: Ethical dilemma, pharmacist, pharmacy

Introduction

Ethic; It is a field of philosophy that examines elements such as duty, responsibility, necessity and virtue, analyzes moral judgments about right or wrong, evaluates the origins of moral behavior and attitudes, and generally examines and tries to define the characteristics and requirements of a good life [1]. With a different definition; The sum of the values that enable people to evaluate the options they should do or not do and that prepare the infrastructure for this is called ethics [2].

Until the early 1980s, the concept of ethics was evaluated mostly within the framework of morality [3]. However, morality; It is the sum of traditional behavioral rules and criteria that have been accepted by certain groups of people in a certain period and control the relations of people both with each other and with society [4]. Likewise, the individual's ability to maintain self-control and thus exhibit correct behavior, regardless of any social coercion, can also be defined as morality [5]. Ethics, on the other hand, is a philosophical discipline that examines moral concepts

and moral rules and evaluates the judgments that constitute the origin of moral attitudes. In other words, morality is an existing, realized situation, and ethics is the philosophy that examines this situation [6]. When evaluated from this perspective, ethics can also be called a behavioral science that examines the parameters of morality [7].

Just as there are many definitions of ethics made by different people at different times, types of ethics have also been categorized in various ways. In these distinctions, which are generally made under the headings of individual and business ethics, business ethics is also examined under headings such as organizational ethics, business ethics, managerial ethics and professional ethics [8]. Before touching on professional ethics, which is the axis of this study, it is useful to look at the definition of profession. Job; It must be the person's main field of activity that is continuous. Work that is not permanent and is done from time to time is not considered a profession. The profession must have a return that is important for the person's livelihood, it

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must be shaped by a systematic knowledge, it must have clear and standardizable criteria, it must have a specific field of performance and a unique training process, and in addition to all these, it must be shaped by manual dexterity [9]. Professional ethics is a profession that is created and implemented by a certain professional group in areas related to the profession, determines the boundaries of professional members, directs them to act within certain behavioral patterns, restricts the effect of personal differences in professional practices, excludes members from the profession who exhibit negative behaviors and does not comply with professional orders, and prevents intra-professional competition. It can be defined as the sum of the principles that shape the rules, contribute to the development of the profession, aim to protect and develop service goals, that is, ensure and protect the benefit of the profession [10].

When we look at the concept of ethical dilemma, which is the main subject of this study; It refers to situations where a situation has truths that cannot be clearly distinguished from each other and these truths are incompatible or conflict with each other, thus making decision-making processes difficult and indecision is experienced in the process leading to the solution [11]. Ethical dilemmas are generally experienced in situations that require choosing between two desired situations or two undesirable situations and cause individuals to have the most difficulty in making decisions. Because in real terms, neither situation may be desired, or both options may be preferred. Therefore, when evaluating, the option with the most pros or the least cons is decided upon [12].

When ethical dilemmas are examined, it is seen that the common point of all of them is that conflicting situations can affect the variables related to the interests of more than one person. Although the concepts of ethical dilemma and ethical deviation appear when conflicts of interest are mentioned, these two concepts should not be confused with each other. While in an ethical deviation, a decision is made based solely on interest, in an ethical dilemma, there is a choice to be made between two right or two wrong situations with reference to ethical values [13].

Finally, when we look at the concepts of pharmacy and pharmacist, it is seen that these concepts are clearly expressed in the "Regulation on Pharmacists and Pharmacies". Here the pharmacist; If a person has graduated from a faculty of pharmacy or pharmacy school or has received education abroad, he/she has received equivalence in our country and as a result, he/she is considered a healthcare professional who is authorized to practice the profession of pharmacy. Pharmacy is; Creating drugs in different pharmaceutical forms from natural and synthetic origin drug raw materials used for the purpose of diagnosis and treatment of diseases and prevention of diseases and administering them to the patient, performing various analyzes and examinations of drugs, continuity of pharmacological effectiveness, reliability and economic controls, stability, standardization and appropriateness of drugs. It is defined as the branch of profession that carries

out the procedures regarding ensuring compliance with quality criteria, providing patients with the necessary information about possible side effects due to drug intake, and communicating these problems to the relevant units [14].

Pharmacy ethics; It is the adaptation of generally accepted values regarding ethics to actions during the practice of the pharmacy profession or their profession-specific differentiation [15]. As in all other areas of ethics, pharmacists should be able to adapt the ethical values and ethical stance they exhibit in general life to their professional behavior [16]. The rules created specifically for the profession, which were formed by introducing certain criteria as a result of examining the ethical problems encountered in the pharmacy profession, also express pharmacy deontology. These rules are stated in the Turkish Pharmacists Deontology Regulation prepared by the Turkish Pharmacists Association in our country [17].

When we look at the ethical dilemmas that pharmacists frequently encounter, it is seen that they are generally related to prescriptions, physicians or product choices [18].

Prescription dilemmas

- Preparation of a prescription that will obviously have adverse effects on the patient,
- Preparing prescriptions that are known to have no positive effects on the patient when different alternatives are available,
- Thinking that the prescribed treatment is wrong and expressing this to the patient in a destructive way,
- The pharmacist does not prepare the medicine that he personally thinks is not compatible with his religious beliefs or moral values,
- Participating in the preparation or administration of medications required for this process in countries where euthanasia is free.

Physician-pharmacist dilemmas

- Providing diagnostic information to the patient who has not been given diagnostic information, even though this condition is known,
- Giving incomplete or incorrect information to the patient upon the request of the physician,
- To question the competence of the physician or a colleague is to express this.

Product selling dilemmas

- Selling drugs that do not have sufficient and satisfactory data on their benefits,
- Sale of products that will not benefit the patient during the sale of products by hand,
- Selling products at different prices to certain institutional employees, groups or individuals,

- Selling drugs that are susceptible to abuse or may cause addiction to individuals who give a negative impression about them [19].

Dilemmas about informing the patient are also common situations in pharmacy. In such cases, the ethical dilemma is usually experienced regarding the principles of confidentiality. Who wants the information is one of the most important criteria. In addition, the boundaries of the topic, where it is discussed, and the people in the area where it is discussed may complicate the situation. Although it is necessary to share patient information with those responsible for the patient's treatment, it may lead to problematic situations in terms of professional ethics [20].

Material and Methods

Type of Research

Our research is in the descriptive research type.

Universe and Time of Research

The population of our research consists of all 226 pharmacies in the center of Malatya. Our study was conducted two month in 2022.

Research Inclusion Criteria

Being a pharmacist in pharmacies located in the center of Malatya and choosing to participate in the survey were determined as sufficient criteria.

Data Collection Tool

The data was collected with a 14-item survey, which included demographic information and then consisted of questions that would help us evaluate the perspectives and practices of pharmacists regarding ethical issues and ethical problems experienced in community pharmacies. Our survey questions were prepared based on our literature reviews and in line with the recommendations and opinions of pharmacists in the field, SGK (Social Security Institution) pharmacists and faculty members of the faculty of medicine.

Collection of Data

The data was collected two month in 2022, using on-line communication channels and face-to-face interviews with people who could not be reached through these channels. The purpose of the survey was explained to the participants and their consent was obtained. No insistence was made to those who did not want to participate, and those who preferred to participate were informed that the survey would take approximately 10 minutes.

Evaluation of Data

The analysis of the data in the research was made with the "SPSS" (Statistical Program in Social Sciences) 25 program. By testing the data for suitability for normal distribution, it was determined which of the parametric or non-parametric methods to use. The significance level for comparison tests was taken as $p < 0.05$, and the values of the variables are given as numbers and percentages.

In parametric data, the results are given as mean and standard deviation, and in non-parametric data, the results are given as median and maximum-minimum values. In the evaluation of the data, statistical results were obtained by using Fisher's exact chi-square test, Pearson chi-square test, and Yatesin-corrected chi-square test, according to the grading of the results.

Ethical Principles of Research

For the implementation of our survey, which was prepared in accordance with our study and completely original, the approval of İnönü University Health Sciences Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee, decision number 2022/3244 dated 12/04/2022, was received. No one was pressured to make their choice to participate in the survey, and the survey questions were administered after their consent was obtained. Individuals were informed that their answers would not be shared with anyone, and the completed surveys were evaluated anonymously, without taking individuals into account. Confidentiality and informed consent principles were complied with.

Limitations and Generalizability of the Study

The limitation of our research is that our research was conducted only on pharmacies in the center of Malatya and that the results can only be generalized to the group in which the research was conducted.

Results

The findings we obtained as a result of our survey were analyzed with the support of statistical experts and the following results were obtained.

According to Table 1, there is a statistically significant relationship between the categories of education levels for the questions about ethical practices in pharmacy ($p < 0.05$).

Pharmacists participating in the survey have bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees as graduations. This table offers us the opportunity to observe the answers of pharmacists according to their current graduation degrees. Accordingly, when the answers were examined, it was stated that almost all participants knew the definition of ethics, but when it came to ethical dilemma, 30.30% (n: 50) of undergraduate graduates and 15% (n: 3) of graduate graduates stated that they did not know the concept of ethical dilemma.

In the event of a possible loss to SGK, 45 out of 165 pharmacists with a bachelor's degree, 5 out of 20 pharmacists with a master's degree, and 2 out of 3 pharmacists with a doctorate degree chose not to inform the relevant authorities.

In the question about giving the equivalent of a prescribed drug without informing the patient about the issue, 60.61% (n: 100) of undergraduate graduates and 55% (n: 11) of graduate graduates selected the no option.

It was stated that in a situation where over-the-counter drugs would not benefit the patient, 90.91% (n: 150) of undergraduate

graduates, 95% (n: 19) of master's degree graduates, and all doctoral degree graduates would inform the patient.

In the question about obtaining their colleagues' patients, 86.06% (n: 142) of undergraduate graduates, 80% (n: 16) of master's graduates, and 66.67% (n: 2) of doctoral graduates selected the option that they would not try to obtain patients.

To the question about giving the appropriate medicine to those who come to the pharmacy without visiting a doctor, 56.97% (n: 94) of undergraduate graduates, 65% (n: 13) of master's graduates and 66.67% (n: 2) of doctoral graduates answered yes.

Regarding the SGK prescription review and payment conditions, 77.58% (n: 128) of undergraduate graduates, 90% (n: 18) of master's graduates, and 100% (n: 3) of doctoral graduates stated that it caused an ethical dilemma.

Regarding the increase in turnover of pharmacies, 72.12% (n: 119) of undergraduate graduates, 65% (n: 13) of master's graduates, and 33.33% (n: 1) of doctoral graduates stated that the increase in turnover could be caused by ethical violations. 50.30% (n: 83) of undergraduate graduates, 40% (n: 8) of master's graduates and 66.67% (n: 2) of doctoral graduates selected the option that they would report unethical pharmacies to the relevant authorities.

65.45% (n: 108) of undergraduate pharmacists, 40% (n: 8) of master's graduates, and 66.7% (n: 2) of doctoral graduates answered yes to the statement "I think pharmacies are ethical."

Regarding the statement "I consult a colleague when I have an ethical dilemma," 82.93% (n: 136) of undergraduate graduates, 85% (n: 17) of master's graduates, and 100% (n: 3) of doctoral graduates chose yes (Table 1).

Table 1. Analysis of survey questions according to pharmacists' education levels

Variables	Categories	Education status			p*
		Bachelor's	Master's	Doctorate	
I know the definition of ethics	Yes	164 (99.39%)	20 (100.00%)	3 (100.00%)	0.932
	No	1 (0.61%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	
I know the definition of ethical dilemma	Yes	115 (69.70%)	17 (85.00%)	3 (100.00%)	0.196
	No	50 (30.30%)	3 (15.00%)	0 (0.00%)	
When I think that a wrong prescription has been given to the patient, I call the relevant physician and have the situation corrected	Yes	143 (86.67%)	20 (100.00%)	3 (100.00%)	0.176
	No	22 (13.33%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	
When people I know are addicts come to the pharmacy, I refuse their inappropriate requests	Yes	161 (97.58%)	20 (100.00%)	3 (100.00%)	0.752
	No	4 (2.42%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	
I inform the authorities about an issue that I think SGK is causing a loss	Yes	119 (72.56%)	15 (75.00%)	1 (33.33%)	0.309
	No	45 (27.44%)	5 (25.00%)	2 (66.67%)	
I give the equivalent of the prescribed medicine to the patient without informing him/her	Yes	65 (39.39%)	9 (45.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0.331
	No	100 (60.61%)	11 (55.00%)	3 (100.00%)	
If I think that over-the-counter medications will not benefit the patient, I inform the patient	Yes	150 (90.91%)	19 (95.00%)	3 (100.00%)	0.716
	No	15 (9.09%)	1 (5.00%)	0 (0.00%)	
I don't try to get my colleague's patient	Yes	142 (86.06%)	16 (80.00%)	2 (66.67%)	0.513
	No	23 (13.94%)	4 (20.00%)	1 (33.33%)	
I try to give the appropriate medicine to those who come to the pharmacy without visiting a doctor	Yes	94 (56.97%)	13 (65.00%)	2 (66.67%)	0.753
	No	71 (43.03%)	7 (35.00%)	1 (33.33%)	
SGK's prescription review and payment conditions cause ethical dilemmas	Yes	128 (77.58%)	18 (90.00%)	3 (100.00%)	0.290
	No	37 (22.42%)	2 (10.00%)	0 (0.00%)	
Increasing the turnover of pharmacies is possible by violating ethical principles	Yes	46 (27.88%)	7 (35.00%)	2 (66.67%)	0.287
	No	119 (72.12%)	13 (65.00%)	1 (33.33%)	
I report unethical pharmacies to the relevant authorities	Yes	83 (50.30%)	8 (40.00%)	2 (66.67%)	0.572
	No	82 (49.70%)	12 (60.00%)	1 (33.33%)	
I think that pharmacies are generally ethical	Yes	108 (65.45%)	8 (40.00%)	2 (66.67%)	0.084
	No	57 (34.55%)	12 (60.00%)	1 (33.33%)	
I consult a colleague when I have an ethical dilemma	Yes	136 (82.93%)	17 (85.00%)	3 (100.00%)	0.718
	No	28 (17.07%)	3 (15.00%)	0 (0.00%)	

*: Pearson chi-square test

Discussion

Although the issue of ethics is becoming increasingly important in pharmacy, as in all professions, when the literature is reviewed, it is a negative situation that there are few studies in our country or in the world that will serve as examples for our work or allow us to make comparisons that will enrich our evaluations.

In the evaluation made according to the education levels of pharmacists, it is seen that 12.23% (n: 23) of the pharmacists who participated in our survey have master's and doctoral degrees. As in many branches of the health field, it is pleasing that there are more educated individuals in the pharmacy profession who have developed their knowledge academically in specific areas. When Table 1 is examined, although there are not large gaps in the comments of pharmacists regarding their graduation degrees, it is seen that the sensitivity of pharmacists with a master's and doctoral level is higher in variables such as reaching and correcting erroneous prescriptions to the physician, collecting fees from patients, and being able to stay in the pharmacy and follow up on work. It can be said. However, the answers given show that among the participants who have a bachelor's degree, they think that SGK's prescription practices cause ethical problems and have a more optimistic view on the ethical nature of pharmacies in general.

In a similar study conducted by Kocabacak; the three most important problems stated by pharmacists were the frequent changes in health policies and practices (18.4%), the frequent outage of the SGK provision system (12.9%), and the failure to specify the period for which the reimbursements were made (8.4%) [21].

Conclusion

This research, which allows us to evaluate the ethical problems experienced in pharmacies and the perspectives and practices of pharmacists regarding ethical problems, was carried out with the aim of applying it to all 226 pharmacies in the center of Malatya.

Although it is not a professional obligation, the increase in the number of pharmacists receiving master's and doctoral level education has been among our hopeful findings for the future of the pharmacy profession.

As the issue of ethics in pharmacy is becoming increasingly important and there are no meaningful similar studies in the literature, it can be said that this study contains an original hypothesis, taking into account our limitations as a result of this research we conducted on community pharmacy pharmacists. Conducting this study, which can contribute to the literature in the relevant field, on a wider universe will provide important inferences.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the study.

Financial Disclosure

The authors declare that they have received no financial support for the study.

Ethical Approval

The approval of İnönü University Health Sciences Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee, decision number 2022/3244 dated 12/04/2022, was received.

Patient Informed Consent

The participants provided their signed informed consent.

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