

# Building a draft national strategy for implementation of pharmaceutical care in patients with chronic diseases in Republic of North Macedonia

Donka Pankov\*, Nikola Geskovski, Maja Simonoska Crcarevska,  
Marija Glavas Dodov

*Institute of Pharmaceutical Technology, Faculty of Pharmacy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje,  
Mother Theresa 47, 1000 Skopje, RN Macedonia*

## Introduction

Chronic diseases are globally widespread and pose a huge socio-economic problem and challenge to the world community including Europe. Many patients have difficulty following the recommendations for appropriate treatment of their chronic diseases. The consequences of not adhering to the prescribed therapy are ineffective treatments, poor health outcomes and hence increased health care costs. Pharmacists in community pharmacies are the most accessible healthcare professionals to patients and in an ideal position to be actively involved in the management of chronic diseases. In N. Macedonia pharmacists are still not recognized as healthcare professionals with a significant role in the management of chronic diseases. Our vision for the pharmacists in RN Macedonia is to come up with the world trends i.e. to modernize, upgrade and expand the role of the so-called "traditional pharmacist" in "modern pharmacist" in accordance with Europe-Pharmacy vision 2030. The modern pharmacist should go beyond the traditional framework through broadening pharmaceutical care and implementing advanced cognitive pharmaceutical services in community pharmacies by expanding pharmacy services to include medication reviews and new medicine support, thus maximizing the benefits of improving adherence to, and minimizing the inherent risk of using medicines (PGEU, 2019).

In that direction several studies were conducted and processed (Pankov et al., 2016; 2020). Results of the research derived a draft national strategy for development of pharmaceutical care in N Macedonia in direction of

implementation of new, advanced pharmaceutical services in patients with chronic diseases.

## Materials and methods

A focus group observational research preceded above mentioned draft national strategy for development of pharmaceutical care in RN Macedonia.

Cross-sectional analysis of patients, physicians and pharmacists was performed in order to assess their attitudes about the role and prospects of pharmacists in community pharmacies in N. Macedonia in the management of chronic diseases, as well as foresees for pharmacists effective positioning in the chronic diseases management (Pankov et al., 2016; 2020).

## Results and discussion

The overall results of the research showed that all respondent groups, pharmacists, physicians (primary care physicians and specialists) as well as patients recognize the benefits of extended pharmaceutical care for patients with chronic diseases in terms of explicatory clarification of the need for appropriate medicine use and adherence to therapy. Analysis of pharmacists focus group disclosed their believes and assurance that adequate conditions in community pharmacy settings could be provided in direction of successful implementation of additional pharmaceutical care, as well as their willingness and anticipation for involvement in chronic disease management.

The above findings pave the way for building of a draft national strategy for implementation of advanced

pharmaceutical services in North Macedonia, such as Medication Therapy Management (MTM), New Medicine Service (NMS) and Health Promotion Services (HPS).

Implementation of the MTM service in the community pharmacies in North Macedonia should result with improved patients' adherence to the prescribed drug therapy, due to the increased knowledge and awareness for appropriate and correct drug use. Also, patients will be educated about their disease, and purpose for usage of certain medication will be justified accordingly. Possible medication usage errors and safety risks will be minimized. Patients will be taught to identify possible side effects from medications or potential for interactions with other medications (NHS, 2013). Overall MTM would ensure the best therapeutic outcomes for chronic diseases patients in RN Macedonia. The introduction of the NMS, as a national intervention in the community pharmacies in North Macedonia, would provide support for patients with long-term conditions with newly prescribed medicines and help them to improve therapy adherence. This service will improve the effectiveness of the therapy and will reduce additional physicians' visits, hospital treatments and other costs associated with chronic disease management.

Third proposed strategic activity HPS addresses prevention, care and support of patients with chronic diseases, such as risk assessment for certain chronic diseases, smoking cessation services, healthy lifestyle instructions, weight management guidelines, etc. (PGEU, 2019).

Nearly 80% of the surveyed pharmacists share opinion that education and training of pharmacists for successful and effective implementation of pharmaceutical care in chronic diseases management should be done by Faculty of Pharmacy in cooperation with University Clinics and hence pharmacists should be certified accordingly. Higher education institutions should primarily define the "competency framework" for pharmacists in order to provide advanced pharmaceutical services. Subsequently, certified pharmacists should be licensed by Pharmaceutical chamber. In this way, only community pharmacies with certified and accredited pharmacist for implementation of advanced pharmaceutical services will be able to perform them.

Almost 83% of pharmacists' group respondents are consent that there should be remuneration for provision of advanced cognitive pharmaceutical services in the community pharmacies. Accordingly, in a draft national strategy a proposal for reimbursement of MTM and NMS was made by defining the criteria and the corresponding amounts that should be reimbursed by the national Health insurance fund (HIF). Studies confirmed that implementation of the advanced pharmaceutical care services would result in reduced overall costs and hence

positive return of the investment for health care system when compared with normal "traditional" community pharmacy practice (Elliot et al., 2017).

## Conclusion

Modern pharmacists are focusing on patient care and expanding pharmaceutical services in community pharmacies. Implementation of Medication Therapy Management and New Medicine Service and receiving reimbursement from HIF for their implementation in RN Macedonia, would be a milestone for the growth and development of pharmaceutical care and pharmacotherapy effectiveness while reducing health care costs.

Pharmacists will be motivated to continue investing in their knowledge and competencies and will have confirmation that their work as health professionals is valued and recognized.

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