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The rise of Telepharmacy services during the COVID-19 pandemic: A comprehensive assessment of services in the United Arab Emirates

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Objective: The study aimed to explore changes in community pharmacies' processes in response to the pandemic in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and factors affecting the adoption of these changes. Method: A cross-sectional study was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire that was distributed to licensed community pharmacists in the UAE. The survey used to collect information on the type of Telepharmacy services and related topics such as constraints and supports. The evaluation of services was done for three periods: before, during and after lockdown. Results: The number of completed surveys was 391. The majority of the participants were under 35 years old (79.5%), female (65.0%), with a bachelor's degree (82.6%), and working in a pharmacy group (70.6%). Pharmacies provided the services by phone (95.6%) and/or messaging applications (80.0%) such as WhatsApp and Messenger. The community pharmacies provided a variety of services using Telepharmacy tools such as managing of mild diseases, dispensing and delivering prescribed and OTC medications, general health information, and services for patients with chronic disease. The main factors that had significant effects on several Telepharmacy services were pharmacies' type (group/chain vs. individual) and the number of pharmacists in the pharmacy ($p < 0.05$). Lack of time, training and financial support were the main barriers associated with Telepharmacy services among individual pharmacies. Conclusion: Telepharmacy supported the work

of community pharmacies during the COVID-19 pandemic by facilitating the provision of pharmaceutical services. Although the occurrence of several financial and technical problems, it appeared less frequently in pharmacy chains with a large number of pharmacists.

References

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Biography

Hala Al-Obaidi, an Assistant Professor, has a PhD. degree in Clinical and Pharmacy Practice from Queen's University of Belfast – UK(2019), MSc. in Clinical Pharmacy from USM- Malaysia (2010) and a BSc. of Pharmacy from Ajman University-UAE (2005). She worked as a researcher (post-doc) in Clinical department, School of Pharmacy, in Ulster University - UK (2019). She has more than 12 year's research experience and more than four years teaching experience in different universities in the UK and the UAE. She is interested in Telepharmacy, Telecare and innovation approaches that help improve medication management, adherence and wellbeing of the patients.

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