Letter to editor

The call for strengthening the monitoring of Private pharmacies and drugstores in Tanzania

Pankras LUOGA\(^1\) *

\(^1\)Department of Development Studies, School of Public Health and Social Sciences, Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences, Dar es Salam, Tanzania. P. O. Box 65001 Dar es Salaam Tanzania.

Corresponding author: Pankras Luoga, email: luoga.pankras1@gmail.com.

SUMMARY

Developing countries have recorded an increase of private sector operations in running the major economic activities. Tanzania, as other developing countries, recognized a significant role played by private sector in building its economy, including the provision of social services. Over the past four decades, the country recorded rampant growth of private pharmacies and drugstores serving the community. However, the monitoring of services offered in private pharmacies and drugstores has been ineffective, resulting to low quality of services provided. This letter highlights the importance of strengthening the monitoring of services offered by private pharmacies and drugstores.

Introduction

The focus of this letter is on the importance of strengthening the monitoring of services offered by private pharmacies and drugstores in Tanzania. Tanzania is classified as a developing country with a lower average economic level.

This level is characterized by high involvement of the private sector in running the economy, including providing social services to the community. In Tanzania, as in other developing countries, public health systems are weak and growing, and are not meeting the health needs of the community. The state of health systems being weak has resulted to low ability of the systems in serving its community. This situation has led to the idea of using alternative means to reach the unserved population. The means were sought to increase accessibility in terms of affordability, distance to service points and acceptability of health services among various populations. One of the means is the use of private pharmacies and drugstores to increase coverage and reach more people in need of health services (Mhamba & Mbirigenda, 2010). As the result, over the past
four decades, the country witnessed a significant increase of private pharmacies and the services offered in both urban and rural settings (Gonsalves et al., 2021).

The increased pharmacies play an important role in terms of making drugs and health products available to neighboring communities. The specific roles of pharmacies depend on the level of the pharmacy in question. In Tanzania, pharmacy levels range from level one to level three, but the common performed roles are: providing counselling to sick patients, providing prescription of some of drugs, providing drugs and providing the contraceptives. For example, in Tanzania, efforts are being made to make additional services in private pharmacies and drugstores, including providing contraceptives for youth (Gonsalves et al., 2021).

However, the monitoring of services offered by these private pharmacies and drugstores is reportedly ineffective in the country- This gap provides a room for low quality services offered to the community (Mhamba & Mbirigenda, 2010; Nsimba, 2007; Poyongo & Sangeda, 2020; Söderlund & Mendoza-, 2018). For instance, employment of untrained pharmacists and providing the services that do not correspond with facility level and type, professional misconducts and others (Gonsalves et al., 2021). It is common to see a pharmacist’s certificate-used and displayed in a particular pharmacy while that pharmacist is working in another location. The effects of unmonitored drug business in Tanzania and globally are reported to be emerged Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), unaffordable services and deaths (Gonsalves et al., 2021; Kirua et al., 2020; WHO, 2019).

Inadequate skills of conducting supportive supervision possessed by members of the bodies (TMDA and Pharmacy Council) responsible for monitoring private pharmacies and drugstores.

Insufficient financial resources to conduct regular supportive supervisions. The TMDA and the Pharmacy Council do not have adequate financial resources regular monitoring of private pharmacies and drugstores.

1. What should be done to strengthen the monitoring of private pharmacies and drugstores in Tanzania?

Train the staff of Tanzania Medical Drug Agency (TMDA) and Pharmacy Council on conducting supportive supervision to private pharmacies and drugstores. The aforementioned bodies are responsible for monitoring the quality standards of services in private pharmacies and drugstores. The increased skills of the staff increase the ability to conduct effective supportive supervisions in private pharmacies and drugstores.

Providing adequate financial resources to the TMDA and the Pharmacy Council, with the collaboration of the district health authorities, to conduct effective supportive supervisions in private pharmacies and drugstores. Alongside increasing the skills of staff of the bodies monitoring the standards of quality, they should be provided with adequate financial resources to conduct regular monitoring of private pharmacies and drugstores.

Abbreviations

LMICs - Low and Middle Income Countries

WHO - World Health Organization
Declarations

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Not applicable.

Consent for publication
Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials
All the data used are from the references provided.

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Authors’ contributions
PL conceptualized the idea, reviewed the literature and prepared the final letter.

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Author information
1Department of Development Studies, School of Public Health and Social Sciences, Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences, Dar es Salam, Tanzania.

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