

Dijana Bibic, Francesca Wirth, Lilian M Azzopardi

Department of Pharmacy, Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, University of Malta, Msida, Malta
email: dijana.r.bibic.19@um.edu.mt

INTRODUCTION

Pharmacy support staff roles have evolved following the implementation of more patient-centered pharmacy services and the expanding role of community pharmacists in the primary health care system.¹

A relevant level of competence of the community pharmacy working team is essential to meet the expanding scope of patient-focused practice. To ensure the right level of competence of all the pharmacy working team to take on new roles, investment in continuing education and training are recognised as crucial.²

The education strategy for the entire pharmacy workforce has to be flexible and adaptable, accessible to all the team and modelled to meet local needs.³ One such model of education is a needs-based education program, which entails an ability-based learning system applicable in different working settings.²

METHOD

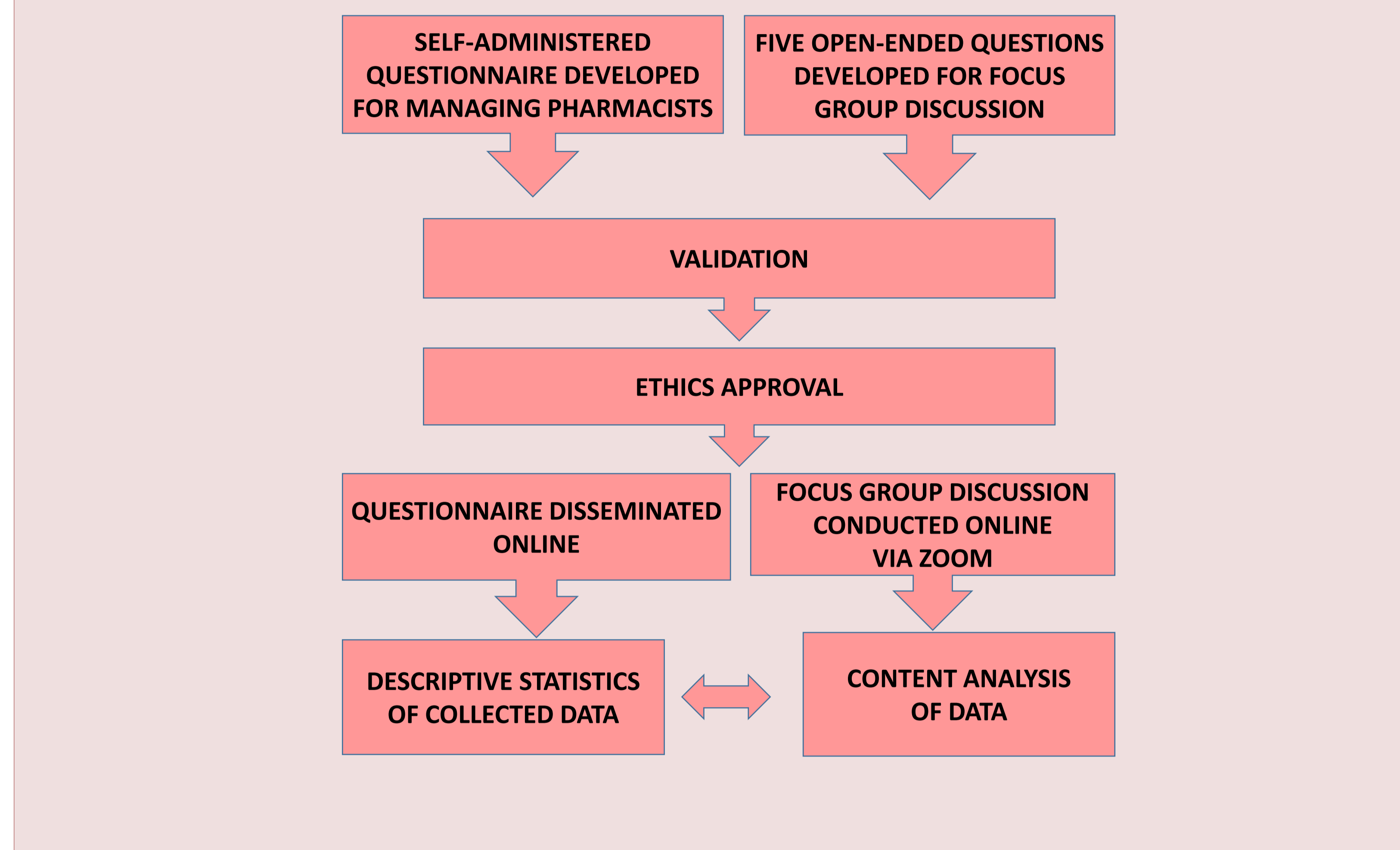


Table 1: Health care services pharmacy support staff could be trained on (N=60)

Health care services	Independent	Group
Drug waste management	23	28
Monitoring blood pressure	21	18
Dispensing medicines through national health service scheme	18	20
Pregnancy testing	14	21
Monitoring blood glucose	16	17
Body mass index measurement	16	17
Urine testing	13	18
Reconstituting medicines	11	16

Table 2: Pharmacy support staff skills considered as 'Very important' (N=60)

Skills	Independent	Group
Communication skills	27	17
Motivation to learn	23	25
Customer-focused	26	22
Accuracy	26	18
Ability to prioritise	26	14
Ability to multitask	23	18
Enthusiasm	25	22
Computer literacy	17	15
An analytical mind	10	13
Mathematical skills	8	3

AIMS

The aims of this study were to:

- Describe current pharmacy support staff structures in community pharmacies in Malta
- Identify education and training needs to ensure the ability of pharmacy support staff to complete required tasks safely and to the required standards

SETTING

Community pharmacy, including independent pharmacies and pharmacies which are part of a group.

Stakeholders involved in focus group included one pharmacist owner of a pharmacy group, one pharmacist owner of an independent pharmacy, one human resources personnel manager of a pharmacy group who is a pharmacist, one practicing community pharmacist and two patient representatives.

RESULTS

- Sixty questionnaire responses were collected; 30 responses from managing pharmacists practicing in a pharmacy which is part of a 'Group' and 30 responses from managing pharmacists practicing in 'Independent' pharmacies.

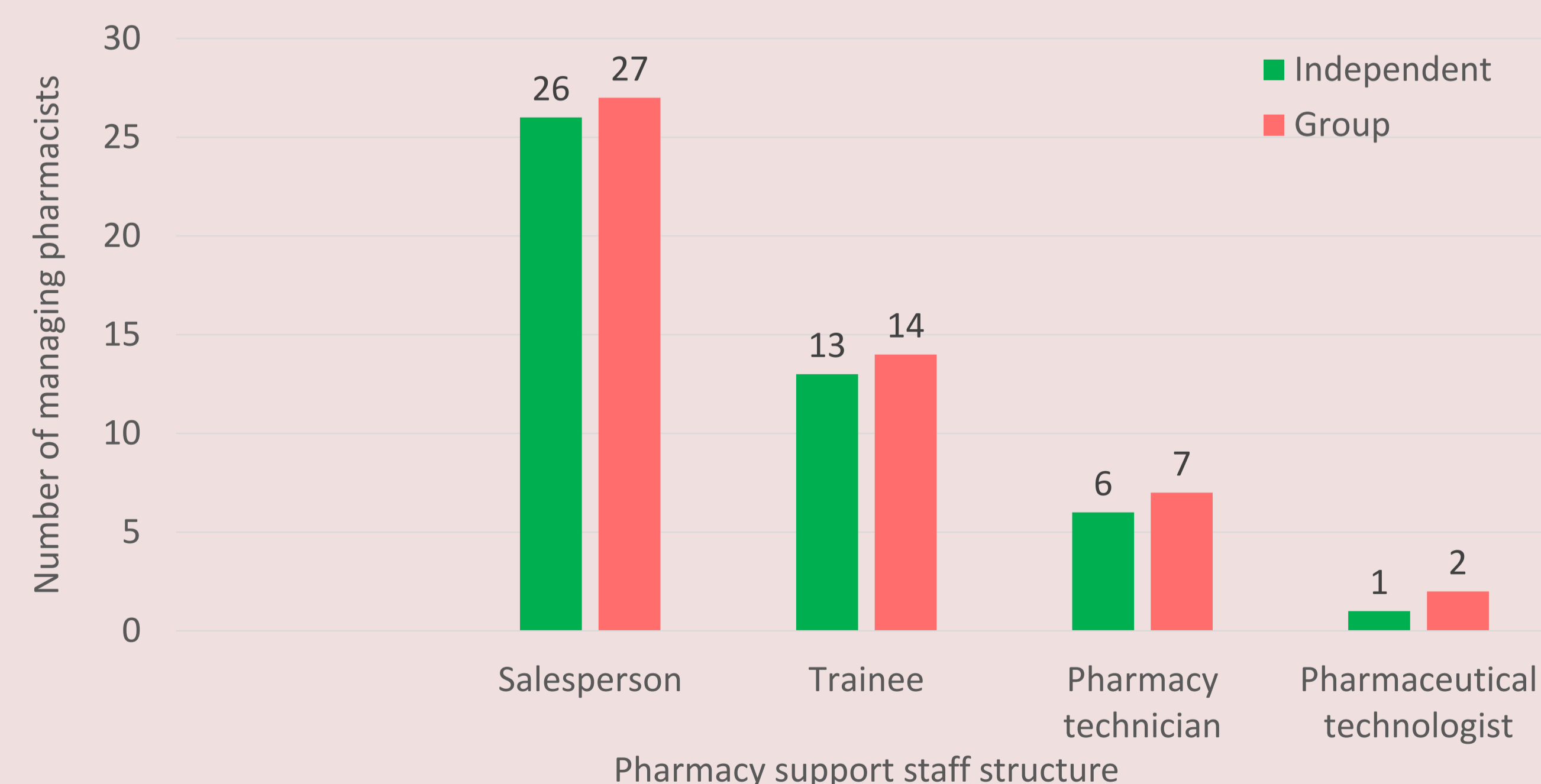


Figure 1: Pharmacy support staff structure (N=60)

CONCLUSION

The identified pharmacy support staff structure consisted mostly of salespersons, followed by pharmacy student trainees. As regards pharmacy support staff skills, managing pharmacists from independent pharmacies considered communication skills as most important and pharmacists from pharmacies part of a group considered motivation to learn as most important.

The study indicates that pharmacy support staff have the potential to be engaged more in following increased and more complex health care needs of the community. The managing pharmacists showed a high level of confidence in the support staff they are working with.

The targeted topic areas for further training of non-pharmacist staff included non-prescription products, skin care, nutrition and food supplements. Additional training could ensure a consistent and higher level of pharmacy service provision, increase patient satisfaction and decrease the incidence of errors.

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