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### ABSTRACT

#### **The Role of Community Pharmacists as Immunizers: Assessing Their Willingness to Administer Immunizations to Adults.**

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**Background:** Immunization is a highly effective and affordable preventive measure against various diseases. Despite this, many immunization programs are not being utilized as much as expected. Interestingly, involving pharmacists in vaccine administration has proven beneficial to both patients and healthcare systems in countries like Portugal, England, and the USA. In Palestine, pharmacists are currently not involved in vaccine services but play an active role in public education. To extend their responsibilities and ensure a more comprehensive scope of practice, it is important to determine their interest in becoming immunization providers, and their knowledge and opinion on the subject.

**Objectives:** To assess the willingness and readiness of Palestinian community pharmacists to administer vaccines, as well as to identify any obstacles that may hinder their involvement in immunization services.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional online survey was conducted with practicing pharmacists, covering various aspects. The survey gathered information on sociodemographic characteristics, pharmacists' readiness to administer adult vaccines, their attitudes toward immunization, and an evaluation of barriers hindering community pharmacists from offering immunization services. Additionally, the survey explored pharmacists' vaccination knowledge, essential components for integrating immunization into their



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practice, and reasons advocating for pharmacists as immunizers. The data was analyzed using descriptive and regression analysis.

**Results:** Out of 401 community pharmacists invited to participate in this study, 398 took part, with the majority being females, constituting 75.6% of the participants. Among Palestinian pharmacists, 86.9% expressed their willingness to engage in vaccine administration. Pharmacists with previous experience in immunization were significantly more willing to immunize ( $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ ), with 59 out of 102 participants with previous experience expressing a willingness compared to 87 out of 296 without such experience. The analysis demonstrates that gender has a statistically significant association with willingness to immunize ( $p$ -value = 0.023), with 45 out of 97 males expressing a willingness compared to 101 out of 301 females. Key barriers to willingness for immunization included concerns about patient safety and the need for sufficient training. Participants highlighted concerns about vaccine integration, such as cost (88.4%), reimbursement (83.7%), limited pharmacy space for vaccine storage (80.4%), and space availability for vaccine administration (65.6%). Moreover, (82.9%) of community pharmacists' showed a high level of understanding the importance of vaccines in preventing and controlling infectious diseases outbreaks. The majority of pharmacists agreed that the main needed element to incorporate immunization in pharmacists practice scope was the necessity of financial reimbursement or adequate remuneration for pharmacists involved in vaccine administration (84.1%).

**Conclusions:** The findings indicate that Palestinian pharmacists are accepting of their role as vaccinators, although they have expressed some concerns regarding financial and legal obligation. This study suggests that additional effort is needed to improve the readiness of pharmacists and pharmacies to offer vaccination services. It also recommends that regulators should play a more active role in highlighting the importance of training and its impact on patient safety and satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Community pharmacists, Immunization, Willingness, Vaccine.