

# Perception of pharmacists and patients of the Pharmacist-of-Your-Choice Scheme in Community Pharmacies

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## INTRODUCTION

The POYC scheme was implemented as a pilot project in December 2007 with the aim being that of facilitating the patient’s life. Through this system the patient is able to collect free medicines from the preferred private community pharmacy of one’s choice and most importantly from the pharmacist of the patient’s choice. Only those patients who are entitled to benefit from the Government’s free pharmaceutical service can register with the POYC Scheme.<sup>1</sup>

## AIMS

To investigate issues in the POYC scheme including the problem of out of stock (OOS) medicines, to conduct structured interviews to patients and pharmacists regarding the issues and costs of the POYC system and to propose improvements to the POYC system according to the feedback received from the interviews.

## METHOD

An extensive literature review was carried out about the distribution of free medicine in Malta, the implementation of the POYC scheme and about the POYC system itself. From the information gathered, two questionnaires were constructed; one for the pharmacists and the other for the patients registered in the scheme. The pharmacists’ questionnaire was written only in the English version whilst that of the patients was written in the English and the Maltese versions. These two questionnaires were then validated by a team of professionals. The questions were assessed

for content validity as they formed part of structured interviews.

A list of pharmacies registered in the POYC scheme was obtained from the Ministry for Health website. Stratified random sampling was performed and 25 pharmacies were chosen from this list to take part in the study. The interviews were conducted in 25 pharmacies. From each pharmacy one pharmacist and 5 patients were interviewed. This resulted in a total of 25 pharmacists and 125 patients taking part in this study. The data obtained was analysed using Microsoft® Office Excel 2007 and SPSS® software version 19.

## RESULTS

The average time to dispense a POYC prescription is 5 minutes. Pharmacists (n=25) listed the following problems with POYC: 23 found the IT system inefficient, 16 found the automated system for orders inefficient, 10 stated that the POYC Unit is unresponsive, 21 believed that financial compensation given per patient is inadequate and 18 stated that the attitude of POYC clients differ from that of private clients

When the patients’ interviews were carried out, the most common complaint about the POYC system was the OOS medication where 118 patients (n=125) have been affected some time or another. This was followed by the inconvenience to go to the pharmacy twice in a short span of time in order to first submit the prescriptions and then to collect the medication. This is because 77 patients (n=125) in this study had to leave their prescriptions at the pharmacy and collect their entitlement a couple of days later. One hundred and twelve patients (n=125) said that the pharmacist approach was better than the one in the old system when patients collected medications from Government pharmacies.

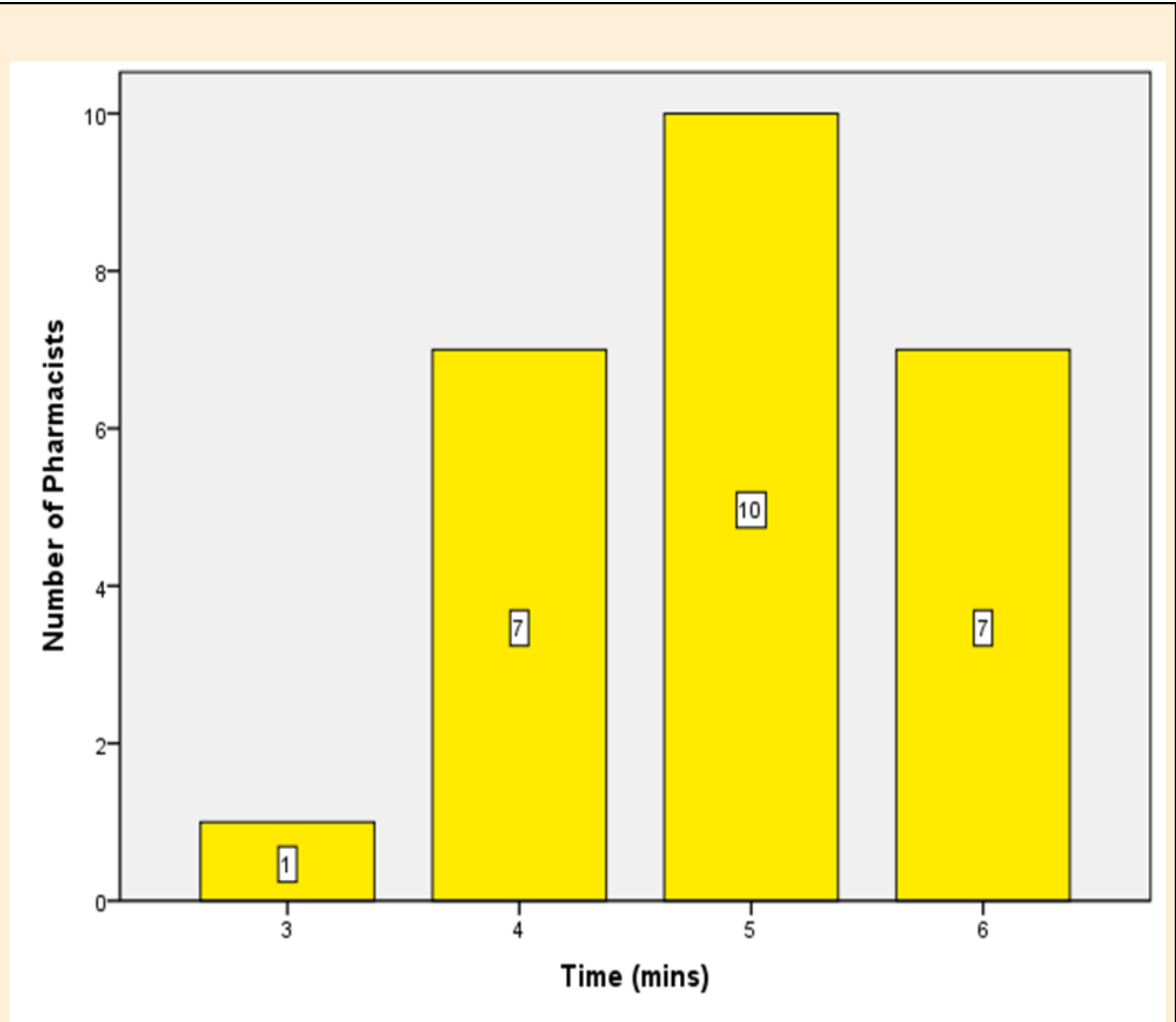


Figure 1: Time taken by the pharmacist to dispense a POYC prescription (n=25)

## CONCLUSION

From this study one can conclude that the POYC scheme has resulted in more benefits to the patient when compared to the old system where the patient had to collect their medicines from Government Dispensaries. In fact, 72.8% of the patients prefer the POYC scheme over the old system. Improvements to the POYC scheme must be made to amend the OOS situation where 118 patients out of 125 have suffered from OOS medication. The IT system needs to be improved as 23 out of 25 pharmacists found it to be inefficient.

### Reference

1. Ministry for Health. The Pharmacy Of Your Choice FAQ & Comments [Internet]. 2013[cited 2014 Sep 10]. Available from: URL: [https://ehealth.gov.mt/HealthPortal/health\\_institutions/pharmacy\\_services/poyc/faq\\_comments/frequently\\_asked\\_questions.aspx#who can benefit from the POYC Scheme?](https://ehealth.gov.mt/HealthPortal/health_institutions/pharmacy_services/poyc/faq_comments/frequently_asked_questions.aspx#who can benefit from the POYC Scheme?)