

FUNCTIONALISM, PHARMACISTS AND PHARMACY PRACTICE

The functionalist theory views society as parts of a system that has specific functions. These parts work together to ensure that social order and stability are maintained. The famous sociologists that contributed to the functionalist theory include Herbet Spencer, Emile' Durkheim, Robert Merton and Talcott Parson. Herbert Spencer, an English philosopher and biologist, views functionalism of having similarities between society and the human body. Society is seen as a whole, in the aspect of functions of its institution's elements. An analogy that was famously introduced by Herbet Spencer explains our body consists of organs. Each organ has a vital function that is important for our body to work just like each part of society. If any of the organs fails to function, our body will malfunction and possibly die. Talcott Parsons, one of the most significant American functionalist sociologists of the 20th century emphasised the concept of dynamic equilibrium, which refers to how society creates social stability. He recognised the four functional subsystems and the functions they serve in society. The subsystems include economic, political, family, and cultural subsystems. These subsystems act not just for their own sake but also to enable the proper operation of the other subsystems.

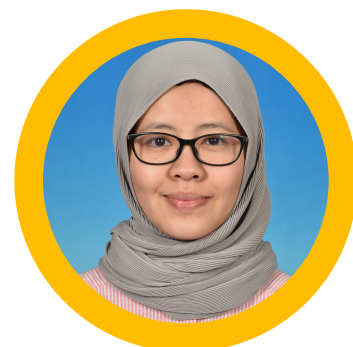
The outbreak of COVID-19 has highlighted the specific functions and roles of each institution in maintaining the equilibrium of society thus enabling us to observe the application of the functionalism theory in managing the pandemic. During the pandemic, actions taken by the government on enforcing movement restriction to contain the spread of COVID-19 infections has interrupted the daily lives of sick persons, especially those with chronic conditions. In terms of healthcare access, a report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stated that one out of eight people delay or avoided emergency medical care due to concern related to COVID-19 infection in the United States (Czeisler et al., 2020). The same reports also mentioned that 54% of respondents who have two or more underlying medical conditions avoided any type of medical care. The findings have resulted in concern on the health status of persons with chronic conditions, particularly pertaining to their continuity of medication therapy. This is supported by reports from retrospective analysis on a dataset of US prescription drug claims from May, 2019 through August, 2020 that showed an overall 12.5% reduction on claim of prescription for chronic medication months after declaration of pandemic. In order to ensure availability and continuity of medication therapy to people who are sick or require chronic medication to control disease and maintain health status, several policy decisions have been taken by the government. The health industries have been given special exemption for operation during the lockdown to ensure sustainability and continuity of medical and personal protective equipment supplies. This includes supported industries such as those involved in packaging and logistics of the supplies (Pharmaceutical Services Programme - Ministry of Health, 2021).

In terms of pharmaceutical services, the Ministry has offered three months full subsidy for delivery of medications to the patients through the enhanced Ubat Melalui Pos (UMP) programme. Patients who went to the hospitals or clinics were given longer prescription refill duration to reduce their need for travel and exposure to virus (Pharmaceutical Services Programme - Ministry of Health, 2021). Pharmacists has also introduced virtual medication counseling services (VMCS), which was made available to patient who has just started on new medications and medical devices, non-compliant to their medications, unable to attend the counseling session physically, patients referred by healthcare professionals for experiencing adverse drug reactions, and their caregivers (Wai-Yin et al., 2021).

Apart from that, pharmacists went beyond their boundaries in ensuring access to COVID-19 vaccines, through regulatory approach as vaccination was reported to be the most promising intervention to reduce disease severity and mortality as well as to reduce transmission of the virus by achieving immunity toward the infection. An improvised regulatory pathway for registration of pharmaceuticals during disaster was introduced without impeding safety, quality, and efficacy of the product. The National COVID-19 Immunisation Program has proven its effectiveness in order to recover the function of society of this nation.

The approach of functionalism has clearly shown during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the approach to paradigm shift of the society was initiated by the government and every institution within the society, including healthcare which has evolved in response to disruption or dysfunction of the system in the society. This is in line with the concept by Emile Durkheim in which society parts and as a whole affects one another, and each element of society must collaborate and work together to keep society in balance and in order (Durkheim 1893). Even though the nation is still in the process of recovery, the health system at the time of this writing is mostly restored (pertaining to rate of positivity and health system capacity).

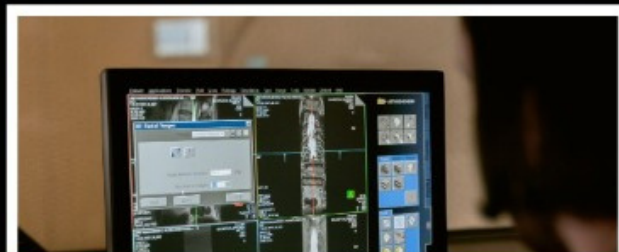
In conclusion, functionalism sees society as an organised network of social institutions/structures that are interconnected through their own function based on accepted social values/norms, that contribute to its stability. In terms of the health model, functionalism focuses on the maintenance of health in all individuals that the health or survival of the social organism depends centrally on how smoothly its parts function. All parts are interdependent and must be at a high degree of integration and coordination of each structure to ensure the society is functioning. With the limitation of functionalism perspective towards modern society, social institutions are forced to evolve and change according to current socially-expected functions and values. However, it is impossible to ignore the significance of its influence on other sociology theories.



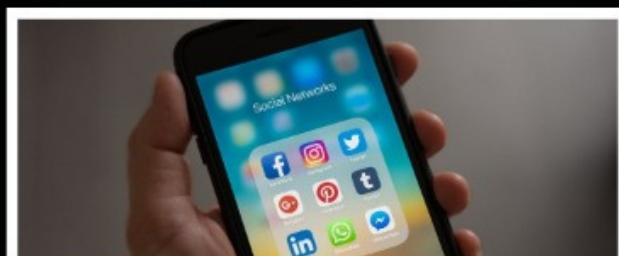
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