

"Customers already come to the pharmacies for other things": Nahid, VisionSpring field sales officer, on increasing sales of reading glasses in pharmacies

Ambika Samarthya-Howard

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Ambika Samarthya-Howard: What's been the hardest part about the work you are doing?

VisionSpring Field Sales Officer (Nahid): It is hard to work this job. I have to go to five districts, and working with the pharmacists can be hard. They have new products, and when I collect the money from them, I find that to be difficult.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: The person I am speaking with is Nahid. He is the field sales officer for Vision Spring? He is specifically working for the CVC program?

What are you seeing in the difference between pharmacists that are doing well and the pharmacists that are doing less well?

Nahid: Of the 35 pharmacies, there are five or six who don't keep their store open all day. They close during lunch, and they do slightly worse. They get fewer patients. The ones who do well stay open all day. They have extra staff so even if they are not available they can still make the sale.

Translator: What are the hours of the ones who do well or don't do well?

Nahid: The good ones [stay open] from 10AM to midnight. The ones who don't do well don't open in the mornings, they generally open in the evenings.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Has he experienced resistance to selling glasses? Pharmacists who don't want to sell.



Nahid: Not really, I don't know any pharmacies who don't want it. Sometimes when they open a new pharmacy they don't understand, but we go a few times and show them how much they can make in profit, they decide to stock the glasses. We show them that when a customer comes to buy medicine you can also sell them glasses, and that makes them happy.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: What is the initial resistance?

Nahid: They feel that eyes are sensitive, they have concerns around that, or that people won't trust them. When we go and show them all the marketing materials, then they become willing to sell them.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Right now a lot of pharmacists are selling ten glasses a month. How can we get them to sell one hundred?

Nahid: I am alone in Sherpur. If I go to one pharmacy and spend more time interacting with customers, then maybe we can increase sales. Also people ask for higher quality glasses. A lot of people ask if I can get them higher quality glasses, they are willing to pay more.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: If I had a million dollars and I was going to either give glasses to pharmacies or give glasses to community health workers, what should I do?



Nahid: The pharmacies will do better. Customers already come to the pharmacies for other things. When they come, they will see the glasses and they will be interested in buying them. If someone goes to their house they might not have the money to buy. Pharmacists are more trusted in the community, people are more likely to listen to them compared to a community health worker.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Does he think pharmacists and health workers can work together?



Nahid: Yes, [pharmacists and community health workers] can work together. When they go house to house, not everyone has money to buy glasses. But they can let people know that they can come to the pharmacy to buy glasses in the future.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: What is something your pharmacists could be doing better?



Nahid: They need to give more training. Better training for engaging with customers, being able to work with them better. Also, pharmacists should go to the markets and promote sales during those days when there are a lot of people in the markets who might be interested in buying.

Translator: Is there anything else you want to add?

Nahid: The glasses we have are good, we are getting new glasses and hopefully more people will come and be interested. If we can give gifts to the vendors, they will love us more and be more willing to promote our products.

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Ambika Samarthya-Howard (she/her) is Solutions Journalism Network's Chief Innovation Officer. She strategizes on communications, metrics, impact, product and technology, leveraging platforms for the network and creating cool content. She also leads the Solutions Insights Lab, an initiative of SJN that uses targeted research and analysis to identify and interrogate what's working and what's not in a particular sector or field. She has an MFA from Columbia's film program and has been creating, teaching and writing at the intersection of storytelling and social good for two decades. She has produced content for Current TV, UNICEF, Havas, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Prism.

** This interview has been edited and condensed.*