

CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

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Point of care testing to guide antimicrobial prescribing in primary care and its value: Findings from an expert advisory panel

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Introduction: Diagnostic point-of-care (PoC) testing has become an important part of everyday clinical practice in many areas. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, its use gained substantial attention from the general public. However, as society moves out of the pandemic, it is unclear whether this perception will continue and, more importantly, whether healthcare systems will be more willing to fund it than before the pandemic.

Objectives: VALUE-Dx is an Innovative Medicines Initiative-funded project aiming to assess the value of diagnostics for community-acquired acute respiratory tract infections in reducing antibiotic prescribing and antimicrobial resistance (AMR). As part of the project work, the authors aimed to explore experts' views regarding the impact of the pandemic on raising awareness about PoC testing and its value among the public and health system decision-makers.

Methods: An expert advisory panel (EAP) was convened to advise the project team. Its membership comprised regulatory, health technology assessment (HTA), payer and clinical experts (n=12). In a series of three meetings, the EAP members were asked for their views about the impact of the pandemic on

perceptions around and the uptake of diagnostics and any learning from the pandemic that can be used to inform efforts to prevent AMR. The meetings were recorded, and key discussion themes were identified and summarised narratively.

Results: An exploratory analysis showed that the discussion themes could be grouped into four thematic areas. The first was about political awareness and its impact on uptake. It was the view of the EAP that the COVID-19 pandemic had raised political awareness of the importance of diagnostic tests and their impact on the economy and day to day functioning of society. This increased awareness creates an opportunity to emphasise the importance of diagnostics for combatting AMR. The second was about the extrapolation of this effect beyond the pandemic. It was the general view that the significant focus on diagnostics in COVID-19 may not necessarily translate to a similar focus in other infectious diseases and AMR unless stakeholders are engaged appropriately. The third was the importance of collaboration and coordination of efforts internationally. This applies to developing, evaluating and implementing AMR diagnostics on a European level and globally. Finally, the need for robust assessment of value regardless of circumstances. It is important to adopt a formal, standardised approach to the assessment and reimbursement of diagnostics, similar to those in place for pharmacological treatments. This ensures that only products representing value for money are reimbursed.

Conclusions: The COVID-19 pandemic has given the healthcare community an opportunity to explore and implement a system-wide approach for the development, evaluation and implementation of POC diagnostics. Learnings from this opportunity should ensure maximum value from using these diagnostics to reduce the threat of AMR.

Awareness of elderly patients on herbal products in Serbia

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Introduction: Although medicinal plants have been known since ancient times, increased use of herbal products has been evident in the last few decades, mainly as a part of self-care treatments. In addition to the positive health effects, herbal products can cause certain side effects and interactions with conventional therapy, especially among elderly patients.

Objectives: To examine the awareness, habits and attitudes of elderly patients towards the use of herbal products in the Republic of Serbia.

Methods: The quantitative, non-experimental research was conducted using a questionnaire in public pharmacies in February 2020. Patients older than 60 years were included in the study. The study was anonymous, and patients gave informed consent.

Results: The study involved 436 patients, of whom 62.4% were female. Most respondents live in the city (72.9%) and have a high school or lower education degree (61.9%). Most patients (32.3%) use herbal products daily, while only 12.1% rarely or never use them. Every fourth patient (24.5%) uses them for treatment of disease, while 69.5% to improve their health. Although most patients purchase herbal products in pharmacies and health food stores (53.6% and 20.8%, respectively), a significant number (19.3%) collect medicinal plants and prepare herbal preparations. The main sources of information about medicinal plants/herbal products are pharmacists (39.7%) and people from the immediate area (28.4%), followed by the media (18.2%) and physicians (11.1%). According to the survey, 48.9% of the participants think herbal products are generally safe but may have some side effects. On the other hand, 35.8% of the respondents believe that herbal products have no side effects at all. Half of the respondents (51.4%) believe that herbal products are as effective as or more effective than synthetic medicines. Less than one-third of patients (29.8%) indicated that they knew the difference between herbal medicinal products and dietary supplements. Still, a third of patients (36.7%) needed additional explanations for using herbal products. 76.6% of

patients stated that they always receive advice from a pharmacist when purchasing herbal products.

Conclusions: The survey conducted in this work showed that elderly patients use herbal products to a considerable extent, which means that it is necessary to educate elderly patients on this matter. Pharmacists should play a vital role in this process and actively discuss the characteristics and proper use of herbal products with patients, especially considering the high possibility of interactions with conventional medicines and the occurrence of side effects. Since some herbal products' quality could be questionable, especially non-regulated ones, patients should be encouraged to purchase them from pharmacies and consult pharmacists.

Medication review in Belgian community pharmacy: Challenges for further implementation

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Introduction: Medication review is still in its infancy in Belgium, and since September 2017, a pilot project on type 3 medication review (MR3) has been running at the Royal Pharmacists' Association of Antwerp.

Objectives: The aim was to gain insight into the challenges during the implementation of MR3 in Belgium among pharmacists without MR3 experience and pharmacists who were recently trained in conducting MR3.

Methods: On the one hand, a survey was distributed to 759 pharmacists across Flanders. On the other hand, participants of the MR3 training course were surveyed by telephone.

Results: The survey yielded 208 responses (27% response rate), with 85% of community pharmacists stating that they were familiar with the concept of MR3 but had not yet conducted it. The biggest obstacle was freeing up time (81%). Other challenges were staff shortages, insufficient knowledge, rejection from general practitioners (GPs), and lack of reimbursement.

Among pharmacists recently attending MR3 training (n=14, 70% response rate), lack of time was also seen as the main