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No time to lose': costs of determination with capillary method of glycohemoglobin A1c in primary care

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Aim: To analyze the efficiency of a circuit for determining capillary HbA1c versus the traditional circuit (extraction and laboratory determination).

Methods: 3-months before-after study. Inclusion criteria: poor metabolic control, lack of regular checks (>1 year without HbA1c). We registered: age, sex, time of evolution, anthropometry, glycemia and HbA1c (baseline/3 months). The assessment is based on: time spent per patient and the level of achievement of the main objective (HbA1c) and suitability recommendations, based on Student's t test or nonparametric test, as appropriate.

Results: We recruited 40 patients, 24 (60%) men, mean age 68.7+11.9 years. Average time of diabetes' evolution: 8.9 +5.5 years. Lost only 6 patients (15%). Initial HbA1c: 7.82+1.35%; at 3 months: 7.61+1.17% (p<0.001).

Measurements: 42.5% nothing, 20% increased dose of insulin/oral hypoglycemic drugs, 10% treatment step change, insulinization 7.5% and 7.5% others. The appropriateness was positive in 26/34 cases (76.5%). Recent published cost for a single determination of HbA1c is 6.13€. Obviously, it is not counted costs of extraction, transportation, nor time lost by professionals (appointment, nurse, doctor) than in similar reviews ranged from 3-8, 18-20 and 13-15 minutes, respectively, and time lost by patients (72-118'). The new capillary method consumes an average of 5 minutes per patient, each reagent kit cost 7.20€, with the advantage that the result is delivered immediately to the physician, who can make appropriate changes (2 minutes). If we consider two doctor visits (7' each one) to request a test, another to read the result, the new circuit for capillary sample is an important opportunity for improvement and saves almost 50% time, approximately.

Conclusions: Performance of capillary HbA1c test is useful, provides better metabolic control and prevents therapeutic inertia. Additionally, this strategy saves time to professionals and patients, with a reasonable price.