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The too frequent repetition of some blood tests generates inappropriateness and increases costs

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Background & Aim: in everyday practice each GP or other doctor may prescribe more than 100 blood tests. The question is whether all of these tests are always appropriate. Often the patient, for anxiety or for other reasons asks to repeat the exam more frequently than provide the rules of evidence based medicine. So we calculated how much costs the repetition of some tests used most frequently.

Method: we took the data base of all blood tests carried out by residents in the Local Health Authority of Empoli (240,000 inhabitants). We chose to analyze the repetition of some tests and the impact of inappropriateness if repeated too many times in one year: cholesterol, triglycerides, Prostatic Specific Antigen (PSA), fecal occult blood test (FOBT), protein electrophoresis (inappropriate if > 2 times a year) and international normalized ratio (INR) (inappropriate > 18 times a year). We have established a cut-off normal repetition within 1 year derived from the scientific literature. We calculated the number of tests that exceeded the cut-off for each type of test and calculated by applying the standard costs, as these inappropriate requirements and repetitions generate more costs for our community.

Results: the 4.7% of patients make an inappropriate blood test. The greater inappropriateness of repetition occurs in FOBT 19.8% and for PSA, 10.5%.

Conclusions: this inappropriateness hasn't huge numbers, but it generates excessive costs for all the inhabitants of the Tuscany Region (3.8 million inhabitants) over 1 million euro per year. We will take action on doctors prescribing (85% are GP and 15% are doctors hospital specialists). We will use a special software that aids prescription (decision support software) together with the meetings of peer review that already we carry with GP.