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Awareness of vitamin B12 deficiency in type 2 diabetics on long-term Metformin amongst Irish general practitioners

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Background: Metformin induced Vitamin B12 deficiency has a reported prevalence of 10-30%. Despite numerous published clinical diabetic guidelines including NICE (National Institute Clinical Guidelines), SIGN (Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines) and Irish Diabetic Guidelines, none address the issue of metformin induced vitamin B12 deficiency. Considerable overlap exists between symptoms of diabetic neuropathies and Vitamin B12 deficiency and differentiation between the two difficult at times.

Aim: To assess the awareness of metformin Induced Vitamin-B12 deficiency amongst Irish General Practitioners and their current monitoring practice.

Methods: Questionnaires were distributed to 249 general practitioners and general practitioner trainees via email, direct drop to practices and postal methods.

Results: were included in an excel database and analysed with SPSS software. Results: 51% (N=126) of questionnaires were returned completed. All participants managed patients with type 2 diabetes of which 53% (N=67) were aware of the risk of metformin induced Vitamin B12 Deficiency. 60% (N=49) routinely measured Vitamin B12 in patients on metformin. Monitoring of Vitamin B12 levels post metformin ranged from 3 months (12%), 6 months (22%) and 12 months (31%). 77% (N=97) believe Vitamin B12 should be routinely measured in patients on metformin.

Discussion: It is clear there is mixed awareness regarding metformin induced vitamin B 12 deficiency. With the rise of diabetes on the rise and metformin frontline medical management, it is time for the guidelines to include recommendations on its monitoring. Without appropriate screening, symptoms of vitamin B12 deficiency can easily be assumed to be due to diabetic neuropathy promoting inappropriate treatments. The results of this study support annual monitoring of Vitamin B12. Main Outcome Measures: There is no clear consensus for the monitoring of metformin induced Vitamin B12 deficiency amongst diabetic patients despite there being a clear relationship between the two. Vitamin B12 monitoring should be an integral component of diabetic guidelines.