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Point of care testing in the West of Ireland - testing who cares

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Background: Point of Care Testing (POCT) is defined as a ‘laboratory medicine service using small analytical devices (testing specimens like blood, saliva, urine and faeces) provided near the patient rather than in a traditional central laboratory’. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest POCT use in primary care may improve speed and accuracy of diagnosis, facilitate efficient clinical management and improve patient care. The aim of this study is to establish the level of support for POCT in principle amongst GPs in the west of Ireland, identify which POCTs would be of benefit and to assess the feasibility of POCTs.

Methods: A quantitative cross sectional observational survey. We distributed questionnaires at Medical Education (CME) meetings in counties Galway, Mayo and Clare during the month of November.

Results: Our response rate was 70% (n= 143). 92% (n=132) of participants would like to introduce new POCTs in the primary care setting. Respondents felt POCTs would assist the prompt and accurate diagnosis of a wide range of acute and chronic diseases. The main perceived benefits were guidance in decision making 43% (n=61) and reducing referral rates 29% (n=42). The most commonly perceived disadvantages were cost 45% (n=64) and time 34% (n=48)

Conclusion: This is the first study in Ireland to assess the level of support for POCT use. Those surveyed felt that POCT would benefit patients, but there needs to be further research into their cost-effectiveness, and guidelines for their indications and implementation.