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Allergy education needs in primary care: results of a questionnaire

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Background: It is well recognized that knowledge of allergic conditions is sub-optimal in primary care resulting from a lack of education at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The Primary Care Interest Group of the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology undertook an educational needs survey to understand what primary care professionals felt their knowledge gaps to be, how they prioritized their training needs and how they would like to have them met.

Method: An electronic questionnaire was devised and distributed as widely as possible, mainly by personal contacts. All European Primary Care colleges listed on WONCA websites were contacted but only three or four replied of which Romania was the biggest respondent.

Results: 2226 people from 63 countries viewed the questionnaire: Complete data were available from 513 respondents and partial from 176. Mean age was 46.8. GPs comprised 516 of the total, of whom 116 had a special interest. Self-declared gaps in knowledge were expressed for Anaphylaxis, Exercise induced anaphylaxis, atopic and contact dermatitis, urticaria and angioedema, food and cow's milk protein allergy and drug reactions with a correspondingly self-expressed educational need.

Results also revealed, that most of respondents have access to spirometry, SIgE and skin prick test, but still make referrals for investigations, with lack of knowledge, confidence and familiarity being important issues. Low access was expressed for patch tests, FeNO, drug allergy tests and oral and bronchial provocation tests, with correspondingly higher referral to the specialist.

The most favored learning modalities were: Online guidelines (69.6%) and courses (68.8%) followed closely by workshops (68%), structured online modules (63.9%) and small local working groups (59.75%). Podcasts and webinars scored poorly with only 25% expressing these as preferred learning modes.

The preferred electronic platform was the personal computer (82.6%). Fewer than 30% did not wish to have their knowledge assessed. The favored assessment format was an online structured examination from an accredited body (62%).

Conclusion: A better understanding of the needs of primary care should help guide educational initiatives to meet those needs. Allergy patients could then benefit from a wider holistic approach to their care.

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