The perspective of self-governing local communities regarding pharmacy services in Slovenia

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Background Pharmacy services in Slovenia are part of public health services on a primary level. The organization of appropriate pharmacy network via public institutions or concessionaire and provision of services is the role of local municipalities. However, little is known about the views of local governments on this matter.

Purpose We aimed to explore the views of Slovenian municipalities on pharmacy services, with special emphasis on the current state of the services, future developments and positions on pressing issues related to pharmacy services.

Method Mixed methods approach was used. Firstly, a questionnaire was sent to all Slovenian municipalities (212), covering 5 main themes: the current state of pharmacy services, pharmacy network, potentials for development of pharmacy services, collaboration between pharmacies and municipality, financing and economic issues related to pharmacy services. At the end we also asked for some general information about the municipality. Questionnaires were fulfilled by municipal workers, responsible for pharmacy services; the response rate was 35.8%. Secondly, in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of exposed issues, we performed a focus group with participation of 6 mayors, representing municipalities differing in size, region, type of pharmacy services provision and political background.

Findings The local governments believe pharmacy services in Slovenia are at a high level of expertise and organisation. Despite overall satisfaction, issues with accessibility in less populated areas, insufficient level of collaboration with pharmacies and unsolved founding rights in public pharmaceutical institutions were exposed. Municipalities have recognised opportunities for further development, mainly in increasing the access to pharmacy services and strengthening the market share of public pharmaceutical institutions. Cognitive pharmacy services ranked high among future developmental goals; however, willingness to take needed measures (e.g. employing new pharmacists, provide financing for new services) is lacking. Mayors, participating in the focus group, also plead for a stronger role in management of public pharmaceutical institutions, claiming pharmacists' competencies for professional provision, while organizational and financial aspects can be covered by other profiles. The main challenges for faster development of pharmacy services in the future are improving the cooperation of municipalities and pharmacies, and ensuring stable finances for the establishment of new pharmacy services.

Conclusion According to municipalities pharmacy services in Slovenia are of a good quality, although several challenges and opportunities exist. The insights gained are of high value in planning future developments in pharmacy services, especially in the light of upcoming upgrade of Pharmacies Act in Slovenia.