

A pilot questionnaire-based survey about Bulgarian pharmacists' opinion for implementation of pharmaceutical care for patients with rare diseases

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Background Pharmaceutical care (PhC) for patients with rare diseases (RDs) is a complex of knowledge and skills aiming to provide closely monitoring, timely consultation, prevention of drug-related problems and postponement of disease complication. Due to the rarity of these conditions the possibilities of Bulgarian pharmacists to apply PhC are questionable.

Purpose The goal of this pilot study is to assess the pharmacists' opinion on the possibilities for implementation of PhC for all patients with rare diseases in Bulgaria.

Method A questionnaire-based study was conducted among MSc pharmacists working in community pharmacies located in South, North, East and West regions of Bulgaria. The targeted pharmacists are from all 28 regions in Bulgaria, but due to the pilot character of the study, we are presenting initial results. The survey included questions about the possibilities for implementation of PhC for patients with RDs, the expected benefits of implementation of PhC for patients with RDs; willingness to pay for PhC and the level of qualification of the pharmacists in Bulgaria in the area of RDs. Descriptive statistics has been applied using the statistical program MedCalc.

Findings 82 out of all targeted 362 Bulgarian pharmacists were interviewed. 87% of the respondents were women, with the predominance between 25 and 40 years old (37%). 19.5% responded that patients with RDs never ask for a consultation. The most frequent questions concerned pharmacotherapy (58.5%), legislative and administrative procedures (30.5%) for medicines dispensing. The main problems were lack of time and space (70.7%) and insufficient qualified staff (58.5%). The expected benefits are improving the patients' quality of life (87%) and increasing the confidence in the pharmacist (80.5%). 44% of the respondents think that it is not necessarily extra money for PhC to be paid. However, 23% indicated a fee between 5 and 10 euro per one consulted patient. Only 46% and 78% were familiar with orphan medicines definition and PhC concept, respectively. More than 65% would invest in PhC implementation in the practice. Statistically significant more pharmacists (95% versus 5%, $p < 0.05$) shared that they do not have sufficient knowledge about RDs.

Conclusion This pilot study revealed that most of the interviewed Bulgarian pharmacists are not ready yet to implement pharmaceutical care for patients with RDs in real practice. They realize the benefits and are willing to invest in this initiative, but they still need more training and optimization of their duties and tasks, so they can focus more on the individualized patient care.