

The role of community pharmacies in disease prevention with focus on flu and COVID-19 vaccination from the patient's perspective

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Background In Estonia, the number of vaccinated people against flu has been low for several years. Involvement of new professionals in disease prevention has been considered effective to reach patient groups at risk. Influenza vaccination took place in community pharmacies for the first time in 2018 and has been successfully continued in the following years.

Purpose The aim of this study was to evaluate and compare patient feedback towards flu vaccination at community pharmacies in 2018 and in 2020 during COVID-19 pandemic.

Method In Estonia, the total number of people received flu vaccination at community pharmacy was about 9100 in 2018 and 14000 in 2020. Setting: Community pharmacies (n=16) participated in the flu vaccination project in October-November 2020. Study method: cross-sectional survey evaluating feedback about accessibility and quality of vaccination service and willingness to vaccinate against COVID-19 at community pharmacy. Study sample: people who received a flu vaccination at community pharmacy. An Ethics Committee approval (No 327T-29) was received for this study.

Findings Of the study participants in 2018 (n=257) and 2020 (n=365) about half received flu vaccination first time. In 2020 there were 1/5 of the respondents whose immunization had previously taken place in a community pharmacy. In 2020, the number of people who were afraid of falling ill was half as high as in 2018 (70% versus 48%). About 1/3 of the respondents named the spread of COVID-19 as the main cause of fear of infection. Participants would receive other vaccinations at community pharmacies, including the national vaccination program vaccines (Tetanus, HPV, Measels etc). The vast majority of respondents believed that vaccination against COVID-19 would help stop the spread of the virus, 79% would vaccinate themselves in the future and 92% would like to receive this service at a community pharmacy.

Conclusion Based on the example of influenza vaccination, community pharmacies are well positioned to participate in disease prevention in Estonia. In the period of COVID-19 pandemic it is important to employ different settings and specialists in healthcare to deal with several health threats.