

Fast-Track to Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) diagnosis: a multidisciplinary approach to increase awareness and screening through community pharmacies

Patricia Soares, Ana Pinto, Ema Paulino, Maria Teixeira, Mariana Rosa.

Background In Portugal, IBS has an estimated prevalence of more than 1 million patients, although many individuals with symptoms do not consult a physician and are thus not formally diagnosed. This has an impact on daily life and social functioning.

Purpose To identify and fast-track to diagnosis people with symptoms suggestive of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) through a pharmaceutical intervention based on the application of Rome Criteria IV in the community pharmacy setting.

Method Prospective study in community pharmacies. A literature search was conducted in PubMed/Medline, as well as sources for grey literature. The keywords used were: 'IBS patient journey' and 'IBS care'. A pharmaceutical intervention that would fast-track people with symptoms to diagnosis was designed by the research team: the 'Happy Gut' program consisted of three tasks that correspond to an initial symptom assessment (t0) with subsequent referral to the physician, and two follow-up contacts, that take place 1 and 2 months after referral. A computer application was customized to support the intervention: patient registration, automatic task scheduling, and follow-up forms. Logins were assigned to 108 pharmacies and training was provided to pharmacy teams. The data collected was anonymized and handled by the application.

Findings Preliminary data from the first phase of implementation indicates that 183 people were included in the program since July 2020, having been identified by pharmacists using the pivotal Rome IV Criteria. Participants were mainly female (75,0%). The mean age was 55 years (min 7; max 93). The dropout rate was 5,47%. 75 participants have already completed the follow-up after referral, of which 6 (8,0%) have been diagnosed with IBS.

Conclusion The early identification of symptoms can be done at the community level by pharmacists who have been trained to recognize key criteria for IBS. The design of the IBS patient journey allows data-driven interventions performed in everyday pharmaceutical practice.