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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Knowledge and attitudes among patients with asthma and parents and physicians towards influenza vaccination

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Abstract
Background: Influenza is an infectious disease, dangerous for all people, especially for some risk groups such as patients with chronic diseases and health care workers. But most of the people under the risk of influenza, including health care workers are not immunised because of misinformation. In this study, we aimed to determine the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes of patients with allergic rhinitis and asthma and parents of such children related to influenza vaccination. Attitudes and beliefs of physicians treating these patients about influenza vaccination were also investigated.
Methods: Two different questionnaires consisting of various items related to influenza vaccine were distributed to physicians and patients and parents of children with asthma and allergic disease.
Results: The physicians group consisted of 189 physicians from various branches. About one third of physicians from various branches reported that they did not believe the vaccine's effectiveness. Most of the participating physicians did not immunise themselves with influenza vaccination despite the fact that any patient of theirs had died due to influenza infection.

Although nearly half of the 183 patients had been vaccinated with influenza vaccine, only 27% of adults and 11.7% of children had been vaccinated annually.
Conclusions: Asthmatic patients are not immunised regularly with influenza vaccine due to misperceptions about vaccine effectiveness and fear of adverse effects. Another important reason of this is that most the physicians caring for these patients neither immunise themselves nor recommend the vaccine to their patients.
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Introduction

Influenza (flu) is an infectious disease caused by an influenza virus and yearly outbreaks lead to three to five million cases of severe illness and about 250,000–500,000 deaths.[1] Therefore, influenza vaccination is the most effective strategy for prevention of influenza virus infection and its complications, such as pneumonia. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends annual vaccination for nearly all people over the age of six months-especially pregnant women, children between six months and five years of age, those with chronic diseases and healthcare workers.[2] Despite these facts, anti-vaccination movements lead to the fear of people from the vaccines due to misinformation.[3] Unfortunately, some doctors and health care workers are also affected by this negative propaganda and neither immunise themselves nor recommend it to their patients.

In this study, we aimed to determine the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes of patients with allergic rhinitis and asthma and parents of such children related to influenza vaccination. Attitudes and beliefs of physicians treating these patients about influenza vaccination were also investigated.

Materials and methods

In the first part of the study, a questionnaire was distributed to various physicians who take care of allergic and asthmatic patients in their daily practice. The questionnaire consisted of 12 items regarding the physicians' demographic characteristics, personal qualifications, influenza vaccination recommendations and beliefs and attitudes towards effectiveness and side effects of influenza vaccine. In the second part of the study another questionnaire containing 12 items regarding their (and their children's) clinical diagnoses and knowledge and attitudes related to influenza vaccine were distributed to patients and parents of patients (Table 2). All of the questionnaires were to be filled out on sight.

The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Sisli Etfal Teaching and Research Hospital, Istanbul.

Statistical analysis

We first performed descriptive analysis of the demographic and health variables potentially affecting the influenza vaccination rate. We used chi-square test to compare categorical variables and *z*-test for independent proportions to compare the proportions. A *P* value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

The physicians group consisted of 189 physicians from various branches most of whom were paediatricians and pulmonary physicians (Table 1). Nearly all the physicians who specialised in allergy and asthma care believe in the effectiveness of flu vaccine, but 30% of general paediatricians and physicians from other branches did not believe in the vaccine's effectiveness. Most of participating physicians did not immunise themselves with influenza vaccination, despite the fact that no patient of theirs had died due to influenza infection (Table 1). Although a significant portion of respondents from physicians group said they had seen patients with influenza in the previous influenza season, some of them recommended the influenza vaccine only to those patients with serious diseases (Table 1).

The second part of the study consisted of 81 adults and parents of 102 children (Table 2). Most of the patients

Table 1 Demographic and professional characteristics and answers to the questions of physicians from various branches related to influenza vaccination.

Characteristic and answers of the physicians	Ped.	PAI	PP	AAI	Other
Number	92 (%)	20 (%)	41 (%)	20 (%)	16 (%)
F/M	59/33	13/7	23/18	13/7	8/8
Age (years)	38 ± 8.2	41 ± 4.5	45 ± 6.2	43 ± 5.6	47 ± 7.3
Mean time of profession	17 ± 3.8	19 ± 6.8	22 ± 7.2	20.5 ± 3.2	23 ± 6.3
Number of patients with asthma and allergic rhinitis					
<10	52 (56)	0	0	0	5 (31)
11–30	40 (44)	0	12 (29)	0	10 (62)
>30	0	20 (100)	29 (71)	20 (100)	1 (6)
I believe the flu vaccine's effectiveness	69 (72)	20 (100)	34 (83)	20 (100)	11 (69)
I recommend it to all my patients	65 (71)	20 (100)	34 (83)	20 (100)	10 (62.5)
To me the flu vaccine has serious side effects	10 (11)	0	5 (12)	0	5 (31)
I saw patients with flu in the previous season	78 (84.7)	17 (85)	34 (83)	16 (80)	12 (75)
Any patient of mine has died due to flu complication	11 (12)	0	2 (5)	1 (5)	1 (6)
I have ever caught flu infection at least once	78 (85)	19 (95)	37 (90)	18 (90)	14 (87.5)
I apply the flu vaccine to myself annually	10 (11)	13 (65)	16 (39)	14 (70)	9 (56)

Ped, paediatrician.
PAI, paediatric allergist/immunologist.
PP, *pulmonary* physician.
AAI, adulthood allergist/immunologist.
Other, physicians from other branches.

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