PHYSICIAN USE OF THROAT SWAB TESTS IN PRIMARY CARE PRACTICES

This was a multicenter survey study of primary care physicians across Germany, which was conducted through the AIM*Responses from physicians who used throat swab tests (n=750); physicians could choose multiple answers

SURVEY POPULATION

The proportion of patients who tested positive for strep A infection in the current study versus 613 patients

DIAGNOSIS OF STREP A AND ANTIBIOTIC PRESCRIPTIONS BASED ON THROAT SWAB TESTING

Our study could not investigate the reduction in antibiotic prescriptions via point-of-care testing. However, when two studies from a primary care practice setting in Germany are compared, a reduction can be assumed: 23.9% of patients with acute pharyngitis received an antibiotic prescription in the current study versus 64% in a study by Kern and Kostev, translating to a 60.8% increase.

CONCLUSIONS

The use of throat swab tests in patients with acute pharyngitis across primary care practices in Germany was considered by physicians to be important, and could strongly reduce inappropriate use of antibiotics in clinic practice, in line with the aims of the German guideline for treating/managing sore throat.

REFERENCES

1. Krüger K, et al. Dtsch Arztebl Int 2021;118(11):188–94; 2. Cots JM, et al. Acta Otorrinolaringol Esp 2015;66(3):159–70; 3. Kern WV and Kostev K. Antibiotics (2018) 7, 65.1% of patients who tested positive for strep A, it was not clear whether antibiotics were prescribed or not; for 25 patients who tested negative for strep A, it was not clear whether antibiotics were prescribed or not. Overall, 73 primary care practices presented throat swab test results for 613 patients.

Aim

To evaluate the use of point-of-care tests using throat swabs to detect Streptococcus pyogenes Group A (strept A) infection among patients with sore throat/acute pharyngitis in primary care practices across Germany.

Methods

This was a multicenter survey study of primary care physicians across Germany, which was conducted through the completion of two questionnaires between February 2021 and March 2022.

The questionnaires were provided to the physicians in primary care practices by sales representatives during a face-to-face visit. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the physicians were provided with 10 tests free of charge. Completed questionnaires were collected at another visit.

The first questionnaire included questions about the use of throat swab tests in everyday practice (Table 1).

The second questionnaire was developed for physicians to include throat swab test results of patients with sore throat/acute pharyngitis:

For each patient tested, physicians could indicate whether the test was positive or negative, if an antibiotic was prescribed, and if symptomatic therapy was recommended (if symptomatic therapy was recommended, further details were provided).

Table 1. Questions included in the first questionnaire

Table 2. Results from 1257 practices

Figure 2. Physicians’ views on the importance of integrating throat swab tests into everyday practice

Figure 3. Proportion of patients diagnosed with strep throat via a throat swab test and who received antibiotics

Figure 4. Proportion of patients who received a recommendation for symptomatic treatment

In total, 41.9% (346/825) of physicians frequently used throat swab tests in a defined patient population (eg elderly patients)

According to the German guidelines for treating/managing sore throat, the proportion of patients with acute respiratory diseases who received antibiotics decreased from 46% in 2008 to 22.2% in 2018, suggesting that point-of-care testing may improve antibiotic prescribing decisions.

Primary care practices play an important role in the treatment of acute respiratory diseases. The guidelines for sore throat management from the German Society of General and Family Practice (DEGAM) provide diagnostic and therapeutic approaches to avoid overtreatment and overtreatment of sore throat to reduce unnecessary antibiotic prescribing and help identify patients at low risk of bacterial respiratory disease, enable patients and primary care practices to make shared decisions on treatment.

After excluding red flag symptoms, the German guidelines recommend symptom-based first-line treatment with topical throat preparations containing non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and/or anesthetics and systemic antimicrobial medicines. Symptomatic treatment options will help to underline general practices and empower the patient to self-manage their symptoms.

In conclusion, the use of throat swab tests in primary care across Germany was considered to be important by physicians, and could strongly reduce inappropriate use of antibiotics in clinic practice, in line with the aims of the German guidelines for treating/managing sore throat.