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Title: Putting patients at the heart of healthcare: Respiratory allergy care in 18 European countries

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Body: Aim. To evaluate, from the patients' perspective, how Europe cares for patients with respiratory allergies (RAs; allergic rhinitis and asthma) in order to identify national gaps and patients' needs. The survey was part of the 4-year Allergy Awareness Project of the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Disease Patients Associations (EFA). Methods. Data were collected via an online 3-part questionnaire: 1) Basic facts: epidemiology, disease definitions, prevalence and costs; 2) Access to care: diagnosis, management, role of healthcare professionals in patient management and follow-up; 3) Quality of care: national policies and best practices. EFA member associations (n. 38) received the questionnaire. Data were also obtained from governmental sources and the scientific literature. Results. Associations from 18 countries returned the questionnaire. RAs affect 20%-30% of the European population. But RAs, and particularly allergic rhinitis, are not considered serious diseases, and thus often remain underdiagnosed and undertreated despite the heavy burden they place on patients and society (in all 18 countries, direct RA costs reach millions of euros). In most countries, patients have difficulty in seeing specialists, and coordination among physicians is lacking. However, countries that implement national programs (Finland, Czech Republic) have seen reduced costs and better quality of care. Conclusions. Awareness of RAs and their social burden is low. There is a need for better prevention and coordination among healthcare professionals. Patients' associations can help increase public awareness, and must be actively involved in devising and implementing RA management and education programs.