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Title: Diagnosing asthma and COPD in primary care patients in Serbia: A multicenter study

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Body: BACKGROUND: Asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are often unrecognized and undertreated. AIM: The aim of this study was to describe the frequency of COPD and asthma in patients with respiratory symptoms and/or smoking history in primary care settings in Serbia, and to examine the agreement between general practitioners (GPs) and pulmonologists on the diagnosis of COPD and asthma. METHODS: In this multicentric, prospective, observational study GPs from practices in 3 different centers in Serbia identified eligible patients from October 2009-Jun 2010. The study included all adult patients with respiratory symptoms and/or smoking history based on structured interview. The patients were referred to a pulmonologist and underwent a diagnostic work-up, including spirometry. RESULTS: There were 2074 patients, 38.4% men, mean age 54±15.5 years. Patients were mostly current (40.3%) or ex-smokers (27.4%). The common symptoms included shortness of breath (84.9%), cough (79.1%) and wheezing (64.3%). The COPD diagnosis was confirmed by pulmonologists in 454 (21.9%) and asthma in 455 (21.9%) patients. COPD was newly diagnosed in 226 (10.9 %) and asthma in 269 (13.0 %) of the cases. There was a moderate agreement between pulmonologists and GPs on the diagnosis of COPD (kappa 0.41, 95%CI 0.36-0.46) and asthma (kappa 0.42, 95% CI 0.37-0.465). CONCLUSION: A significant number of patients seen in GPs office was diagnosed with COPD or asthma and half of them represent new cases. A substantial proportion of patients referred to pulmonologist by primary care physicians have been misdiagnosed.