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Title: Contribution of lung function tests in asthma screening: About a representative population

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Body: Introduction: The major difficulty in epidemiological studies of asthma is due to the methods used to formulate the diagnosis. Studies conducted through questionnaires related frequencies often higher than those of objective tests including measurement of flow rates or airway hyperresponsiveness. we show through this study the contribution of spirometry in the diagnosis of asthma. Methods: A cross-sectional survey, single pass, representative of the general population was carried out in the capital of Tunisia in subjects aged from 2 to 50 years. Informed consent was obtained. Prevalence was determined through questionnaires, validated and used in international surveys, corresponding to the asthma screening and lung function tests. Spirometry was performed only in subjects reporting respiratory or atopy symptoms. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 18.0. Results: The study included 4470 subjects. There was 40.2% male and 59.8% female. Current asthma prevalence was 6.8% in adults and 5.9% in children. Lung function tests were normal in 92% of cases (839 subjects). There was an airflow obstruction disorder in 11 individuals, 7 of which were reversible. Fifty subjects gain more than 12% in forced expiratory volume (FEV1). Of these, 20 did not report symptoms of asthma but had symptoms of atopy. We deduce that 19.6% of asthmatics had a reversibility and 6,8% were asymptomatics. Conclusions: In the absence of gold standard, it is difficult to define asthma in epidemiological studies. If the measure of bronchial hyperresponsiveness has a specificity similar to questionnaires on asthma symptoms, it is also less sensitive.