

An Early Report on a Local Project about Primary Health Care to Improve the Communication and the Compliance in the Elderly for Vaccine Campaigns against Influenza

Filippo de Nicolellis*

Primary Health Care, ASS 5 "Bassa Friulana", Fiumicello, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy

*Corresponding author: Filippo de Nicolellis, Primary Health Care, ASS 5 "Bassa Friulana", Fiumicello, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy, Tel: 39 334 1502557; E-mail: m.mazzero@libero.it

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Abstract

The article is an early report on a cultural project, focused on developing e-communication and other tools in a rural area of Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy. The Medical Association "CROCE MEDICA" is making all efforts in Primary Health Care to increase the rate of people vaccinated against influenza.

The Association is promoting the use of posters in family doctor's offices as well as of e-mails to communicate the patients dates and procedures for the vaccination against influenza. Furthermore the Association e-mails its registered doctors a dispatch about influenza as well as a request for information about the illness seasonal evolution in the various areas of Friuli Venezia Giulia. Unfortunately the feedback has been scarce up to now.

It is difficult to state if the better information provided about free vaccination for some categories of patients and its importance as well as about the dates of vaccination sessions is increasing the rate of people involved in the vaccination campaign. As a matter of fact there has been a decrease in the percentage of vaccinated people in the investigated area in the last year, a decrease due to several factors. Nevertheless I believe all efforts aiming at improving the communication with patients and explaining how to obtain the vaccination against influenza are useful in any case.

Biography

Filippo de Nicolellis graduated at Rome University "La Sapienza" in 1986, where he specialized in infectious diseases in 1990. From 1995 to 2000 he worked as a family doctor in Doberdò del Lago/ Doberdob (Gorizia) and since 2000 in Fiumicello, Udine, in Friuli Venezia Giulia, in the north-east of Italy. Since 2000 he has been the president of the medical association "Croce Medica", which deals with the organization of Health Services and Permanent Training and particularly with Primary Health Care and Emergency.

The communication and the organization of the vaccination against influenza in a rural area of friuli venezia giulia in the field of primary health care: an experience

A Local E-Network to Keep Doctors Informed

Why a local E-network dealing with medical information about infectious diseases?

At the time of SARS contagion, it emerged the need to improve the information provided by the Public Health Service. Some of the doctors operating in the territory, especially in rural areas, have decided to use the Internet to rapidly exchange information about possible clinical cases in the area.

The association "Croce Medica", along with SMI (The Italian Union of Doctors), took the initiative to issue an on-line dispatch called "SARS" sent to 106 doctors, members of the two groups, who are

generally motivated and interested in the organization of the health service in Friuli Venezia Giulia and in setting up a local network of sentinel physicians in the territory, also in order to get a feedback of information.

A dispatch is issued when there are relevant information for the doctors operating in the territory, above all during the periods of wider diffusion of influenza in our area. Besides influenza virus, the dispatch is sometimes about other epidemic diseases which might concern also Friuli Venezia Giulia, such as West Nile virus, Chikungunya virus, Human Metapneumovirus and, recently, Ebola virus.

At the moment "SARS" dispatch is being addressed to 106 doctors around all the area. Unfortunately the information feedback is still scarce and it is limited to an average of 3 out of 106 doctors, who send information in relation to each yearly issue.

Aim of the Project

To optimize the number of vaccinated people in a specific area of Bassa Friulana and to develop an experimental project to better the organization of the vaccination campaign on the part of family doctors in our region.

As a matter of fact this aim is still complex in a country where family doctors do not have an organized structure yet and where they perform a front-line work dealing with the National Health Service users, a work still based on the principle of expectancy and with a limited space for initiative. The vaccination against influenza is free and voluntary for patients over 65 years old, for all the people involved

in essential services (such as education, health, post, army, police, etc) and for people suffering from serious pathologies such as heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, post-splenectomy, diabetes mellitus, cancer, etc. The doctor receives a payment which increases according to the number of vaccinated people over 65 years old.

Methods

I have started this project as a family doctor expert in infectious diseases and as the president of the local medical and cultural association "Croce Medica". I deal with two aspects:

The patients, with communication and information about the vaccinations available in my office.

The colleagues, with information about the vaccination against influenza, updates on its forms and on other infectious diseases widespread or potentially widespread and related to the activity of family doctors.

Organization and Promotion of Vaccination for Patients

I have started to organize specific mass sessions of vaccination against influenza prearranging the communication to the interested patients.

Aims

To improve the quality of the information about characteristics, dates and methods, provided to patients who have the right to the annual vaccination against influenza.

To increase the number over-65-year-old patients who agree on taking the vaccination.

To have enough available vaccine to meet the requests of patients.

Method

To improve the quality of the information provided to patients who have the right to vaccination: In my office several strategies have been used, some of which are simple and common in the area where I work, while some others are moderately new.

Common methods: posters and leaflets provided by primary care trust; information papers reporting about the dates of vaccination sessions in my office.

Innovative methods: e-mail communications sent to 358 out of 1465 patients of my office, who are provided with an internet connection (without taking into consideration their age, because also younger patients may have over-65-year-old parents or grandparents, who can be indirectly contacted in this way).

There have been sent three e-mails: "Advance Notice" e-mails, a month before the effective beginning of the vaccination campaign, as a reminder of its usefulness, of the fact that there is no charge, and of any other information granting a conscious acceptance.

E-mails confirming the beginning of the vaccination campaign, including the dates of the first sessions (six during the month of November).

E-mails reporting about later dates and including information on the end of the vaccination session within the 22nd of December (six further available dates).

To increase the spread of vaccination: by means of e-mails reminding patients of the vaccination dates as well as promoting a new way to contact the family doctor, which is different from the traditional visit to his office or from the phone call. On a general point of view, the communication between doctor and patients has been facilitated as well as the patients' self-organization when they have to take the vaccination (taking into consideration their commitments as well as those of children or grandchildren who have to drive them to the doctor's office and who are often busy at work, etc.).

To have enough available vaccine to meet the requests of the patients: also in this case the combination of common methods, such as personally reserving the vaccine dose in the doctor's office, with the communication and the reservation by e-mail has allowed to constantly have the situation under control and to ask for the vaccine doses realistically corresponding to the patients' requests, reducing wastefulness and being able to guarantee vaccination to all the entitled people.

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Outcome

There has been a small increase in the participation in the vaccination campaign against influenza this year in Friuli Venezia Giulia. This outcome may be interpreted in several ways: because of the improvement of communication? After other factors, like significant media campaigns? All these factors are important, but our cultural association is not in the position of quantifying them.

Vaccination campaign 2012-2013 vaccinated people over 65 years old=55.7%

Vaccination campaign 2013-2014 vaccinated people Over 65 years old=56%

In my opinion the project has contributed to increase the number of vaccinated people, but there is no validation for this theory.