INTRODUCTION

A significant proportion of our population follow a vegetarian diet, as a result of culture, lifestyle choices or religious beliefs. Vegetarian-suitable medication is important for this population.

The constituents of commonly prescribed otorhinolaryngology medicines are often not clearly labelled. Some of these medicines contain animal-derived products. BBC News reported on this topic in February 2012 advocating the need to raise awareness in doctors and patients and for a clear labelling system of medication constituents.

Research demonstrates that doctors and pharmacists are unaware whether medicines they prescribe contain animal-derived products that could contravene patients’ beliefs, choices or preferences. Increasingly we are required to understand patients’ beliefs and wishes and to incorporate these into their treatments.

OBJECTIVES

(1) To calculate the proportion of vegetarian patients in our otorhinolaryngology out-patient clinic.

(2) To explore both vegetarian and non-vegetarian patients’ views on medication that contains animal products and their suitability for vegetarians.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

A face-to-face survey study was performed by a single researcher on 80 patients. Patients were identified from those attending an out-patient otorhinolaryngology clinic appointment at a large South East England teaching hospital during a two week period in March 2014. Data was collected and the results analysed.

RESULTS

40.

Are you vegetarian?

25% Yes 75% No

Reasons for being a vegetarian

20% Religious beliefs 70% Lifestyle choices

If vegetarian, would you ask for medication containing animal products?

19% Yes 4% No 77% Unsure

If vegetarian, would you take medication containing animal products?

19% Yes 4% No 77% Unsure

Should patients be offered a vegetarian alternative if they prefer/choose?

6% Yes 94% No

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DISCUSSION

A significant proportion of patients attending out-patient otorhinolaryngology clinic were vegetarian. The most common reasons for being vegetarian were religious beliefs (20%) and lifestyle choices (70%). This small ‘snap-shot’ cannot be extrapolated to the larger population, though it does demonstrate that there are varying influences for following a vegetarian diet. Lifestyle choice was the leading influencing factor for being vegetarian.

A significant proportion of vegetarians would ask their doctor whether their prescribed medication contained animal products (75%). Not all vegetarian patients would ask this question. For those who would not ask this question it is not known whether vegetarian medication is not a priority, or whether they presume their doctor had already catered for their religious beliefs or lifestyle choices.

Again a small yet significant proportion of vegetarian patients (15%) stated that they would not take prescribed medication which contained animal products. Interestingly all these people follow a vegetarian diet because of lifestyle choice. For this group it is hugely important to not consume animal products. This is of key note for prescribers and manufacturers who label medicine constituents.

Importantly an overwhelmingly majority of the patients questioned felt a vegetarian alternative should be offered if a patient prefers or chooses (94%). Patients clearly feel that it is important to be given choice.

CONCLUSIONS

A large proportion of patients attending the otorhinolaryngology clinic were vegetarian, mostly relating to religious belief and lifestyle choice. Although only one quarter of vegetarian patients would ask whether medications contained animal products, 60% of these patients would not take medications that contained animal products. Of note an overwhelming majority of patients believe that a vegetarian alternative should be offered.

REFERENCES


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