

## Allergic Disease in Primary Care

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**Background** Methods of improving the management of allergic diseases need to be developed following reported increases in prevalence. Allergy is managed largely in primary care, although it is not taught in undergraduate nursing or medical training and there are few postgraduate courses available. The aim of the present survey was to evaluate current allergy practice among previous National Asthma & Respiratory Training Centre (NARTC) Allergy Course diplomates

**Methods** Postal questionnaires were sent to 538 students who had attended the Allergy Course between 1994 and 1999. The questionnaire assessed the prevalence of allergic conditions presenting in individual GP practices and the use of diagnostic tests

**Results** Two hundred and ninety-nine questionnaires were returned (51%) by 175 practice nurses, 76 hospital nurses and 26 other health professionals, 98% of whom were involved in managing allergic patients. Among those working in primary care, allergic asthma was the most commonly presenting problem in 84 cases (48%), followed by hayfever 53 (30%), eczema 20 (11%), perennial allergic rhinitis

5 (9%) and food allergy 3 (2%). Drug allergy, anaphylaxis and urticaria were not reported as the most commonly presenting problem by any responders. Twenty-two (12%) of responders performed skin prick testing. The most commonly cited reason for not performing skin prick tests was lack of GP support, followed by lack of funding, concerns over safety, lack of training and lack of staff.

**Discussion** In this survey, 98% of nurses were actively involved in managing patients with allergic diseases. Allergic asthma, allergic rhinitis and eczema were the most commonly presenting allergic problems in general practice. The majority did not perform skin prick tests, although those who offered this service found it useful. Development of allergy education and the implementation of allergy services in primary care would facilitate improved diagnosis and management of common allergic disorders.

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**Conflict of interest** none declared