

# Editorial

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## Allergology Training at Undergraduate and Primary Care Levels

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This issue includes an interesting contribution from the World Allergy Organization (WAO) on allergology training in primary care.

Allergic diseases are highly prevalent and have a considerable effect on quality of life. In addition, the associated direct and indirect health care costs of these diseases are extremely high.

Over the last few decades, considerable advances have been made in understanding allergic diseases in terms of etiology, immunology, diagnosis, and treatment.

Few medical faculties regard allergology as a specific and complete subject area, with the result that undergraduate training in this field is deficient. However, in daily clinical practice, most, if not all, allergic patients are assessed first by primary care physicians with scant preparation in the field of allergic diseases.

The World Health Organization has warned about this gap between knowledge and practice. Consequently, the WAO recently presented its position paper "Recommendations for Competency in Allergy Training for Undergraduates Qualifying as Medical Practitioners," which we reproduce in this issue of the *Journal of Investigational Allergology and Clinical Immunology*.

The document classifies areas of competency in allergology as follows:

- Basic science and normal physiology of the immune response
- General allergy epidemic
- Most common allergic diseases
- Comorbid conditions
- Basic methods for diagnosis of allergic diseases.
- Therapeutic strategies
- Determination of the degree of severity of allergic diseases and criteria for referral to a specialist
- First and second lines of defense
- Anaphylaxis
- Prevention of allergic diseases.

The description of the different formats for training medical students in allergology is particularly interesting, as it involves possible collaboration with associated areas

of knowledge and takes into account the particular situation of each country.

The document structures and systemizes the education and training of students in allergology in 2 parts:

- Basic science
- Clinical allergology training

It also suggests other aspects of training that could be implemented by means of case reports or problem solving assignments. Methods of evaluation are covered, as are the various resources available for well-structured implementation of training programs.

The document is clear, concise, and practical, and will help harmonize training in allergology for medical students.

In Spain, several sources discuss the different theoretical and practical aspects of teaching and training in medicine (1, 2). The white paper (1) covers the normal structure and functioning of the immune system, as well as different facets of diseases of the immune system, and differentiates between 2 types of knowledge: "only know" (theoretical knowledge) and "know how" (the ability to carry out diagnostic tests without supervision).

Unfortunately, very few medical students have sufficient knowledge of the diagnosis and treatment of allergic diseases in daily practice, particularly in areas such as allergens, diagnosis *in vivo* and *in vitro*, specific treatment, and prevention. More than 25% of the population suffers from an allergic disease and this prevalence continues to increase.

Thanks to the special efforts made by professionals in this field, training in allergology is now provided in the medical faculties of the following universities: Alicante, Badajoz, Córdoba, La Coruña, Madrid, Murcia, Pamplona, Salamanca, Seville, and Valencia.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank all those involved in training Spanish medical students in allergology for their constant effort and dedication.

To conclude, I ask the Ministry of Education, Education Councils, University Rectors, and Deans of Faculties of Medicine to seriously consider the importance of allergology. Training in allergology among our medical students

is clearly open to improvement. Greater knowledge of these diseases would result in more rapid diagnosis, more adequate treatment, and better quality of life for those who suffer from allergic diseases.

## References

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1. Libro Blanco. Título de Médico. Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación (ANECA). 2005.
2. Estándares para la enseñanza de la Medicina. Ed. JL Villanueva, J Millán, M Barón. 2006. Agencia Laín Entralgo. Consejería de Sanidad de la Comunidad de Madrid. Fundación Lilly.