How to Share Health-Related Data for Better Care?

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Anyone may need to seek treatment abroad, particularly in another State of the European Union (EU), for various personal, medical or professional reasons. Beyond national regulations, the directive 2011/24/EU of March 9, 2011, on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare makes provision for the introduction of a general framework to clarify patients' rights with regard to accessing cross-border healthcare provision, guarantee the safety, quality and efficiency of care that they will receive in another EU Member State; promote cooperation between Member State on healthcare matters. The directive has identified the need to circulate medical data from one Member State to another when their citizens are traveling; but how to be able to have access to relevant information for appropriate care or research purposes remains to be seen.

While there is currently a wide range of approaches in the various countries of the EU for storing and sharing patient data, none of these lend themselves easily to cross border use, at least in their current form. In Germany, there is a system based on smart cards but currently healthcare personnel in other countries cannot read this card. In France the Dossier Médical Personnel (Personal Medical Record, DMP) is a computer resource intended mainly for French medical personnel, to which the patient has online access to validate personal data. In addition to access problems, there are major differences in the content of the information that they contain. Thus, the United Kingdom has opted for a national summary care record (SCR) system only containing information relating to drugs, allergies and drug reactions. Moreover, there are also significant differences regarding the conditions for access to data and control of their confidentiality among the many concurrent systems of the EU. Clearly, despite the directive, there is no Europe-wide agreement on either the substance or the form of the data to be compiled. Likewise, there is no general agreement concerning software, technical standards or readers. In the absence of harmonization, a common protocol for access to essential information would be useful. As operators like Orange* have emphasized, the solution to data sharing must be integrated into the practices of physicians and hospitals. This must be easy to use and inexpensive. Common semantic standards understood by everyone need to be developed. It is also necessary to ensure that data entry is secure and reliable. Finally, widely different and incompatible formats and standards are used for provision of healthcare using ICTs throughout the EU. This is creating both obstacles to this mode of cross-border healthcare provision and possible risks to health protection. Also, it is necessary to aim at interoperability of ICT systems and it is important to work on interoperability and respect the division of competences and to support patient access to eHealth applications.

In France, on another level, many stakeholders from private associations and the healthcare and research industries are requesting that data be open and accessible. This led to debate when drafting the Health Act, which plans to combine major medical administrative databases (reimbursements for care, hospital stays, and data from facilities for people with disabilities, causes of death) in a national health data system (NSDS) and to facilitate access for public interest purposes. This openness would represent an opportunity of primary importance to biomedical research, public health research and the social sciences. Ultimately, health data analysis will help to base health policies on objective factors. Matching up medico-administrative databases and clinical, biological, economic and sociological studies, as well as cohorts or other epidemiological surveys will permit better understanding and acting more directly to the health system, or more concretely on the organization of the course of care and health, on drug use, on the conditions of exposure of individuals to their environment, on risks in the workplace, or on the fight against social inequalities in health. It's ambitious, however, and the protection of personal data, confidentiality, respect for privacy and research ethics must be a constant requirement.

EFLM's International Experts Conduct Workshop in Croatia

Croatian Society for Medical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine (CSMBLM) and Croatian Center for External Quality Assessment (CROQALM) have jointly organized an educational workshop on 24 April, 2015 in Zagreb (Croatia). The targeted audiences of this one day workshop were the new recently appointed members of the CROQALM and assistant editors of Biochemia Medica, the scientific journal published by CSMBLM.

CSMBLM has a 30-year tradition of running EQA in the field of clinical chemistry, hematology and coagulation. EQA samples are sent three times per year to all Croatian laboratories and participation is mandatory. Since recently, CROQALM has also launched pre- and post-analytical EQA modules, based on clinical cases with questions (type 1 EQA)[1]. Participation in pre-and post-analytical modules is only educational.

The aim of this workshop was to provide education to newly appointed members of our CROQALM team. Our desire was to learn from esteemed speakers and obtain valuable knowledge and information in order to be able to improve the service we provide to our members.

Speakers of the workshop were internationally renowned experts in the field of External quality assessment (EQA) who have provided high quality presentations on various topics. Prof. Egon Amann from Germany, who is the chair of the IFCC Committee for Analytical Quality (C-AQ), has given a comprehensive overview of the role of EQA in laboratory quality management. Annette Thomas (UK), Director of the Quality Laboratory and Scheme organizer of Weqas, spoke about the necessary steps and prerequisites to successfully organize and run the national EQA. She also gave an excellent presentation about the way to establish participant performance by setting appropriate performance criteria. Specific issues like sample commutability, stability and homogeneity were covered by Piet Meijer, a Director of the ECAT Foundation (External Quality Control for Assays and Tests with a focus on Thrombosis and Hemostasis), from the Netherlands, who also gave a great lecture on some specific issues and solutions for running a successful EQA in coagulation. Barbara De la Salle, Scheme Director at UK NEQAS for General Hematology has presented an excellent overview of various advantages and disadvantages of different sample types for running EQA in hematology. Finally, statistical analysis and data presentation were overviewed by Wim Coucke, from the Scientific Institute of Public Health in Brussels (Belgium).

Each lecture was followed by a fruitful discussion and the workshop was rated as very useful and successful by all participants as well as by speakers. The possibility to learn from such experts who have kindly agreed to share their knowledge with participants is indeed priceless. We have learned a lot and we hope that this workshop will help us to improve our EQA services in the future.

Photo: CROQALM workshop speakers and the members of the Executive Board of the Croatian Society of Medical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine. On the picture, from left to right: Wim Coucke, Annette Thomas, Barbara de la Salle, Piet Meijer, Egon Amann, Ana-Maria Simundic (CSMBLM President), Jasna Lenicek-Krleza (CROQALM chair), Manuela Miletic Lovric (CSMBLM Secretary), Ivana Celap (CROQALM vice-chair), Daria Pasalic (CSMBLM Vice-President)

Literature:

1. Kristensen GB, Aakre KM, Kristoffersen AH, Sandberg S. How to conduct External Quality Assessment Schemes for the pre-analytical phase? Biochem Med 2014;24(1):114-22.

15th EFLM Continuing Postgraduate Course To Be Held in Dubrovnik (Oct 24-25, 2015)

EFLM is pleased to announce that the 15th EFLM Continuing Postgraduate Course in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine, known as "Dubrovnik Course," will be held for the first time in Zagreb on October 24–25, 2015.

This advanced course entitled "How to assess the quality of your method?" is organized by EFLM in cooperation with the Croatian Society of Medical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine (CSMBLM) and Slovenian Association of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (SACCLM).

For 14 years now, the Dubrovnik Courses were successfully organized as one of advanced postgraduate courses in the frame of the programs of the Interuniversity Center Dubrovnik. To make this Course more accessible to participants, it was decided to move it to different venues in South-East Europe. This year, the selected venue is Zagreb.

The bursaries of EFLM, CSMBLM and SACCLM will be available to participants presenting posters.

Deadline for abstract acceptance is May 15, 2015.

Take advantage of early registration and register yourself!

For further information, please visit: www.eflm-course.org

7th Annual Conference of the Lithuanian Society of Laboratory Medicine: A Report

The Lithuanian Society of Laboratory Medicine is the main Lithuanian society, which unites specialists in laboratory medicine—laboratory medicine physicians and medical biologists working in clinical laboratories as well as carrying out research at universities and institutes. It is also open for laboratory technicians and students for participation in the educational events and training. Currently 250 specialists of laboratory medicine are full members of the Society.

On April 17, 2015, the VII Annual Conference of the Lithuanian Society of Laboratory Medicine was held in Vilnius, at the Crowne Plaza Conference Center. More than 200 participants attended this event titled "Role of laboratory medicine in chronic diseases management."

It is expected that in Europe average life span will increase. One or more chronic diseases might burden the advancing age of many Europeans. The incidence of these diseases is climbing alarmingly. Average expenditures for health care are increasing rapidly at older age. Chronic disease costs could have a severe impact on health care system. This is why the shift from treatment to prevention and management of chronic diseases is in need. Today's laboratory medicine – automated, digitalized, and accredited – plays a major role in accelerating this shift and provide innovative tools for chronic diseases screening, early detection and management in order to extend healthy life years.

Six plenary presentations covered wide range of topics related to the most prevalent and critical chronic diseases. The Conference started with Sten Westgard (USA) presentation on the importance of knowing the state of analytical quality, choosing the right goals and right methods for quality control. Next speaker Natalie Le Bastard (France) presented the newest data on application of cerebrospinal fluid biomarkers for early diagnosis of Alzheimer disease. Radvile Malickaite (Lithuania) reviewed determination of immunity response to M. tuberculosis measured by production of gamma interferon. Nicholas Mills (UK) highlighted analytical and clinical issues of high sensitive cardiac troponin I testing in patients with suspected acute coronary syndrome, especially of implementing gender specific normal ranges. Astra Vitkauskiene (Lithuania) shared her experience of the Hospital of Lithuanian University of Health Sciences Kaunas Clinics in laboratory diagnostics and management of cystic fibrosis. The last presentation, given by Vytenis Kalibatas (Lithuania), summarized available tools provided by laboratory medicine for prevention of chronic diseases, helping to cope with challenges and opportunities in today's difficult socioeconomic environment.

The Conference agenda also included IVD manufacturers' session and exhibition of diagnostic companies. Laboratory specialists were provided with information about new products and solutions useful in the laboratory routine. At the same time, Board of the Society in the separate meeting session presented summary of activities and financial situation of the year 2014. Main presented activities: national recommendations and guidelines related to pre-analytical phase (patient preparation and sampling, sample storage and transportation, specimen preparation), postgraduate training of laboratory medicine specialists, promotion of laboratory technicians' participation in Society activities, and development of dedicated website www.llmd.lt. Later on a Task Force for clinical microbiology was approved. The main goals of the Task Force is to initiate and coordinate clinical microbiology procedures and national documentation, to provide guidance on quality assurance and accreditation for clinical microbiology laboratories across the country, to cooperate with Lithuanian specialists of infectious diseases. Delegates of the meeting unitedly voted for the policies of the year 2015. Major tasks include preparation of recommendations on laboratory tests quality management, guidelines on selection of secondary laboratory and advisory services, external quality assurance and recommendations for authorities performing laboratory certifications. It was decided to continue evolving documents on postgraduate training of laboratory medicine specialists. Tasks of a Working group on Pediatric Laboratory Medicine were approved.

One day before the Congress, on of April 16, 2015, an exciting workshop took place in Crowne Plaza Vilnius. Over 60 laboratory managers and quality control specialists from Lithuanian and Latvian laboratories attended workshop conducted by Sten Westgard, world-recognized authority in quality management of laboratory medicine. The workshop covered two important topics. The first one titled "Six Sigma Design and Error Budgets" focused on six-sigma concept, the questions how to choose right quality goal and to make metrics work for the laboratory. The second topic of the workshop "Introduction to Risk Analysis and Risk Management" was dedicated to discuss risk management role in ensuring patient safety and different guidelines for risk analysis and quality control.

In the evening, there was a social event at the Merchants' Club with unforgettable concert given by famous Lithuanian opera singer Sigute Stonyte and pianist Jurgis Karnavicius.

The Board of Lithuanian Society of Laboratory Medicine would like to thank everyone who made this Conference such a success: the speakers for sharing their valuable insights and expertise, the chairs for keeping everything running in time and laboratory specialists for their active participation in this meeting.