

## BELIEFS ABOUT SKIN PRICK TESTING IN THE MANAGEMENT OF ASTHMA IN GENERAL PRACTICE IN NEW ZEALAND

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Anecdotal evidence suggests there is little importance placed on the identification of specific allergies in the primary care management of asthmatics. This study sought to examine the beliefs and practices of health professionals, particularly general practitioners (GPs), in relation to skin prick testing (SPT) of their asthmatic population. **Methods:** Respiratory physicians, respiratory technicians, asthma educators, practice nurses and GPs were interviewed. Transcripts were analysed using a thematic approach. The local community laboratory provided data on the number of SPTs done in the Otago region during the previous 12 months. GPs were selected on the basis of either being a high referrer or a low referrer for SPTs. Three GPs in each bracket were recruited to the study. **Results:** A total of 849 SPTs were performed during the 12-month period (770 community laboratory 79 hospital). Two respiratory physicians, two asthma educators, three technicians, three practice nurses and five GPs were interviewed. Beliefs about the value of SPT in the management of asthma varied widely. Respiratory physicians tended to view its usefulness as limited to brittle asthmatics and for research purposes. Asthma educators referred for SPT only if indicated by poor control or at the patient's request. The practice nurses interviewed did not appear to be part of the decision making process in the referral for SPT. GPs felt that allergen avoidance measures would become an unreasonable burden and queried the usefulness of personal knowledge of specific allergy. All primary care professionals were supportive of patients who expressed a wish to be referred for SPT. **Conclusion:** The most common view was that it was easier and more effective to treat asthma with medication. Knowledge of specific allergy was more often sought for a patient with severe asthma. It appeared that the majority of referrals for SPT in general practice were initiated by an inquiry from the patient.

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