

The Burden of Allergy – hidden costs to UK healthcare



The UK is home to some of world's greatest advancements in allergy research and drug development, with such credits as the first successful specific immunotherapy treatment (performed at St. Mary's Hospital in London) and the creation of novel vaccinations for long-term immunotherapy

In stark contrast, a recent report published by the Department of Health has revealed that the UK continues to lag behind the rest of Europe and other industrial countries in the provision of specialist care for the nation's allergy sufferers.¹ In fact, on average there is just one allergy consultant for every two million patients and only six full-time allergy clinics in Britain. This year alone, more than three million people will be seen in the nation's primary care centres for conditions that may be allergic in origin, while the incidences of hay fever, asthma, and food allergy are all on the rise across the UK, leading to NHS treatment costs in excess £900m annually.²

Although the DoH recognises that the lack of allergy specialists is problematic, little momentum has been built to change the current situation. Instead, charities such as Allergy UK are often left to fill the gap in service, but their resources

significantly improved efficacy compared with contemporary vaccines and much shorter treatment periods. Being developed and manufactured by UK-based Allergy Therapeutics, the efficacy of the vaccine has been confirmed in over 74,000 patients and studies have demonstrated that an effective dose period requires as little as three weeks.

Allergy Therapeutics is pursuing the most advanced injected allergy vaccine development programme worldwide and the company manufactures for international markets from its base in Worthing, West Sussex. It is therefore remarkable that most of its sales are made elsewhere in Europe, where the trained physician infrastructure exists to use these products. Keith Carter, the company's CEO explained, "Some of the world's leading allergy experts are based here in the UK, yet unless action is taken our

vaccines will probably not be available to the large number of British patients who could benefit from it because the fundamental infrastructure to treat patients is lacking. As a British company, we feel this is an unacceptable state of affairs and welcome the focus being brought to it. We agree with the allergists who have commented that observing the problem is not enough; there needs to be a programme of action to address this problem."

Future development and provision of allergy services will require a much clearer understanding of the skills and competences needed from a diverse workforce to ensure high quality and cost-effective care at all stages of the patient journey. The Department of Health will need to work closely with both existing specialists and charity organisations to develop the necessary physician training programmes needed to advance the nation's ability to care for its allergy patients. For now, however, it is important that GPs are aware that a product will be available that could be delivered in a few trips to a local allergy specialist. ■

Although the DoH recognises that the lack of allergy specialists is problematic, little momentum has been built to change the current situation

are limited and they can only provide support functions and directing patients to one of only a handful of specialists. The lack of consultant allergists means that accurate diagnosis and access to the full spectrum of treatment, including allergy vaccines, often remains a 'postcode lottery' that leaves many patients without the possibility of receiving appropriate care.

The problems identified by the DoH are paradoxical as Britain has traditionally led the way in allergy research from its very foundations in the early nineteenth century. One of the most innovative recent developments is an ultra-short course vaccine (4 shots) that provides for

More about Allergy Therapeutics

- Allergy Therapeutics plc is a fully integrated specialty pharmaceutical company with a unique development pipeline that has the potential to transform allergy treatment
- European sales & marketing infrastructure, GMP manufacturing, R&D facilities and 280 employees
- Extensive R&D programme developing unique, "best in class", disease-modifying, ultra short course, allergy vaccines
- Established in 1998, FTSE AIM listed in 2004 (AGY.L) with a heritage stretching back to 1934

References

1. Department of Health. A review of services for allergy: the epidemiology, demand for and provision of treatment and effectiveness of clinical intervention. DoH, Allergy Services Review Team, July 2006.
2. Royal College of Physicians. Allergy: the unmet need, A blueprint for better patient care. Royal College of Physicians Working Party on the provision of allergy services in the UK, June 2003

Keith Carter

Allergy Therapeutics plc.

t: 01903 845 820

e: keith.carter@allergytherapeutics.co.uk

w: www.allergytherapeutics.com