



Letter to the Editor

Italian midwives and influenza vaccination: problems in adherence and perception


In France, midwives have recently been authorized to administer some vaccines to women, pregnant women, newborns, and their family members, in order to improve vaccine coverage. Recently, Massot and Epaulard conducted an interesting study on the perceptions about vaccines among students and professional midwives in France [1]. The French researchers explored what midwives think about vaccination in general, influenza and pertussis vaccines and their attitude toward the immunization of pregnant women, women of childbearing age, infants, and their families. Finally, the paper investigated the vaccine status of midwives against influenza and pertussis. An important difference was highlighted between professional midwives and students. In particular, the students seemed to have a higher perception of vaccine safety and were more in favor of vaccination than the professionals. Referring to the flu vaccination, only 23.5% of interviewed midwives declared that they administered it to pregnant women, even if 51.5% agreed with this practice. It should be noted that 62.8% of midwives were not vaccinated against influenza [1].

As well as in France, the seasonal influenza vaccination for healthcare workers (HCWs) is also recommended in Italy [2]. Nevertheless, some studies showed that Italian HCWs adherence to the flu vaccination is lower than in France and other European countries [3]. We conducted a study in a large university hospital in Northern Italy to evaluate flu vaccination coverage among HCWs and students. Our data confirmed a higher adherence to the vaccination campaign in students (22%) than in HCWs (14.2%), as also shown in the French study. Furthermore, we drew attention to the fact that doctors had higher vaccine uptake than other HCWs. Surprisingly, our study showed that no midwives got the flu vaccination in our hospital in the seasonal campaign 2016–2017. Similarly, the coverage among midwifery students was lower than medical and nursing students (respectively 2.2%, 34.7% and 9.1%). The reason for this low coverage in Italian midwives is probably due to a scarce perception of the effectiveness of the vaccination and of the severity of influenza and its complications in pregnant women. Furthermore, they probably underestimated the risk of transmission from HCWs to patients [4]. In general, midwives seem to underestimate their risks [5]. It is not possible to compare our results with other Italian data, since no specific studies on midwives and their attitude to the influenza vaccination and adherence to the vaccination campaigns have been carried out in our country.

The possibility for French midwives to administer influenza and pertussis vaccines to women, newborns and their family members could possibly be an effective way of increasing vaccination coverages. However, the effectiveness of this practice should be better explored in Italy, since midwives seem to have a negative perception of the flu vaccination. Specific studies on this group of HCWs should be conducted to better understand the reasons for this perception. Hospitals should develop specific educational campaigns about vaccine preventable diseases among midwives and other HCWs, in order to raise awareness about the importance of vaccinations and the risk of the transmission of such diseases to patients. Similarly, we should also improve the education on this issue for healthcare students, who will be the future professionals. Only in this way, midwives could really play an important role in improving flu and pertussis vaccination coverages, providing information and suggesting vaccines to patients and their family members.

Declarations of interest

None.

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