FOOD DETECTIVES: QUALITY OF LIFE, FOOD ALLERGEN LABELLING AND EU LAW

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"I don't want to be special, I just want to be safe"

Patient from the Netherlands

BACKGROUND

- 17 million Europeans suffer from food reactions.
- No cure for food allergy exists.
- Food avoidance is key and access to allergen information and proper food labelling is crucial in food allergy management.

OBJECTIVE

- Develop a comparative analysis of the implementation of the EU Food Information to Consumers Regulation among EU countries.
- Identify the main Regulatory gaps that limit proper disease management.

METHODOLOGY

- Review of literature on the impact of food allergy on the Quality of Life of patients was conducted.
- Consultation to nine national patient organisations working on food allergy to assess the implementation of the FIC Regulation in their countries.
- Collection of data from consumer surveys, country audit reports, guidelines and information from the food industry, hospitality and caterers sectors, scientists and the European Commission.

RESULTS

EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT OF FOOD ALLERGIES

Challenges	Consequences
Constant surveillance	**Anxiety and insecurity** for: 1. Unintentional ingestion 2. Feeling more at risk 3. Effectiveness of treatment
Fear of being judged and feeling ashamed	**Social isolation**
Public spaces perceived as unsafe and risky	**Own safety strategies**: 1. Avoiding public places 2. Bringing their own food
Avoiding public places or bringing their own food	Social isolation
Allergen information difficult to find/understand	1. Risk of exposure 2. **Complicating** decision making

Allergen labelling in food products **is key to protect allergic patients and their caregivers**

EU FOOD INFORMATION TO CONSUMERS (FIC) REGULATION 1169/2011

Identified gap in the FIC	Impact to patients
No harmonised approach on Precautionary Allergen Labelling (PAL)	1. Adoption of **risk taking behaviours** and/or accepting the possibility of a potential allergic reaction 2. Avoid consuming products with PAL statements leading to **restriction of food choices & increase of anxiety** level
Absence of clearly defined reference doses for the 14 listed allergens	**Inadequate protection** of food allergic consumers
Lack of mandatory training or educational programmes at national level	**Risk of allergic reaction** due to inaccurate information
Need for clear and accurate allergen information in the non-prepacked sector	1. **Risk of allergic reaction** due to inaccurate information 2. Unnecessary **limits in social life**

The European Food Information to Consumers Regulation of 2011 was intended to address this need by establishing a set of requirements on allergen information in Europe

RECOMMENDATIONS

For EU Authorities

1. Develop EU-wide guidance on common PAL wording (short-term).
2. Harmonise PAL approach and use criteria, based on quantitative risk assessment (long-term).
3. Establish reference doses for each of the 14 allergens, below which they would pose no risk to most patients.
4. Establish procedures to minimize the risk of cross-contact (non-prepacked food products).
5. Harmonise rules so that information can be provided written or orally, but up-to-date written sources is always available at request (non-prepacked food products).

For National authorities

Develop tailored training and education programmes for Food Business Operators.

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REFERENCES

EFA (2019). *Quality of Life for People with Food Allergies in Europe: A Menu for Improvement.*

READ THE REPORT:

efanet.online/FoodDetectivesReport