EAHP opinion on COVID-19 vaccine programmes and their implementation

Stephanie Kohl

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) is interacting with developers of potential COVID-19 vaccines to enable promising medicines to reach patients, healthcare workers and the population as soon as possible. A conditional marketing authorisation for the first vaccine was issued and vaccination programmes are expected to start across the EU by the end of 2020. With the approval of a vaccine, the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has posed to healthcare professionals all across Europe for the past year are however not over yet. Mass vaccinations which need to be carried out to decrease the impact that the virus has on Europe will confront health systems and healthcare professionals with new challenges. The European Association of Hospital Pharmacists (EAHP) would like to draw attention to the challenges that the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and their administration will present, even more, when more vaccines become available.

The transport and storage conditions of the different vaccines in the development pipeline differ greatly with some requiring low temperatures between 2 to 8 degrees Celsius while others need to be kept at minus 20 or even minus 70 degrees Celsius. Not all hospital pharmacies, especially those operating in small hospitals, are equipped with cooling facilities that can meet the conditions needed for some of the vaccines in development. But even those that have these facilities might not be able to cope with the storage quantities needed to support mass vaccination of the population against COVID-19. For EAHP and its members, it is consequently of uttermost importance that national vaccination programmes take into account the local storage conditions to ensure a smooth roll-out of the vaccination activities across the healthcare sector. These considerations should not only focus on the transport of the vaccines and the storage facilities in hospitals and hospital pharmacies but also look at the conditions at other points of distribution that are tasked with providing COVID-19 vaccinations, such as vaccination centres and healthcare professionals in the communities. Furthermore, information on the preparation and the stability of the product in accordance with temperature should be provided to all healthcare professionals handling the vaccines.

At the point of administration, there will have to be good logistics in place for both goods and persons receiving the vaccine. Some of the vaccines in the approval process require the administration of an additional dose. The timing between doses can vary per vaccine. Using a consistent interval for all two-dose vaccines simplifies the messaging to the public and arrangements within distribution points where alternative vaccines may be supplied at short notice. Citizens should be advised to visit the same vaccination centre for receiving additional doses of a vaccine. Since different vaccines are being approved, healthcare professionals that administer the vaccine should ensure that sufficient stock of a specific type of vaccine is kept to guarantee that the first and the second dose for each individual that receives the vaccine comes from the same manufacturer.

Equally important to providing advice to citizens and establishing adequate logistic processes is the record keeping. To track which person receives which vaccine and which dose of the vaccine the setting up and utilisation of a database will be essential. Such a database, which should be linked to existing systems, is important for monitoring pharmacovigilance and adherence as well as for other purposes such as batch level registration for side effects monitoring and re-calls. Data collected via such a database could also be useful for much-needed research purposes. To facilitate this process the use of scannable codes on the primary packaging is indispensable. Vaccination records should be an integral part of the medication record, so they can state this process the use of scannable codes on the primary packaging of COVID-19 vaccines.

Correspondence to Ms Stephanie Kohl, Policy & Advocacy, European Association of Hospital Pharmacists, Brussels, Belgium; Stephanie.Kohl@eahp.eu
Synergy Satellite events which are looking at recent and innovative developments in the field of biosimilars and antithrombotic stewardship, is spread out over 6 days including evenings and a weekend. This will allow you to attend many more scientific sessions than you would be able to join during a physical event. Congress participants will also be provided with access to session presentations after the Congress and the e-Poster Walk Sessions.

The virtual Congress will cover some of the ongoing challenges faced by hospital pharmacists, like tackling antimicrobial resistance, delivering seamless care, raising the quality of hospital pharmacy compounding, moving forward advances in clinical pharmacy and increasing the role of hospital pharmacists in the multidisciplinary teams in hospitals and on the interface with community or outpatient settings. Also, learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic will be shared. Special registration rates are offered to young professionals and students who can also benefit from this year’s student programme focusing on “Healthcare professionals’ collaboration as a key to patient-centred care”. Find out more via www.eahp.eu.

**EAHP MEMBERS HOME: ALL THE INFORMATION RELEVANT TO YOU IN A NUTSHELL**

EAHP invites you to join the newly created EAHP’s member website where you can find all relevant information such as toolkits, marketing material and direct access to the EJHP. Moreover, Wolters Kluwer offers to EAHP members a subscription to Lexicomp at a special member rate to assist them in their professional careers. For over 20 years Lexicomp has provided smart, independent drug information resources that help students excel in classes and support the decision-making in rotations. Furthermore, Wolters Kluwer as a provider of UpToDate also offers to EAHP members valuable offers and discounts. With UpToDate, hospital pharmacists that are members of EAHP can have access to more than 11 800 Clinical Topics in 25 specialities, more than 9300 Graded Recommendations and 4200 Pharmacotherapy Tables and Algorithm.

**EUROPEAN COVID-19 DRUGS CALCULATION TOOL – WATCH THE TUTORIAL**

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Association of Hospital Pharmacists (EAHP) has made available information and resources for its members. These include but are not limited to the European COVID-19 drugs calculation tool (ECDCT), the COVID-19 Resource Centre and a discussion group hosted on the Zulip platform.

The ECDCT has been created to assist pharmacists, local healthcare institutions, governments, partners and other stakeholders to estimate potential requirements for essential drugs supplies to respond to the current COVID-19 pandemic. The ECDCT generates an estimation of drugs needed over a variable time frame, up to 1 year. The drug demand is calculated based on the forecasting of the epidemiological curve. A tutorial explaining how the tool can be used was made available this month. The tool and the video tutorial can be found on EAHP’s website: www.eahp.eu.

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**ORCID iD**
Stephanie Kohl http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0324-7976