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# Use of natural-based laxatives on the constipation treatment: A survey of the pharmacists perspective

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**Abstract:** The study was based on a questionnaire for self-administered laxatives. Part of this study were 76 pharmacists from Municipality of Tetovo. The questionnaire was developed in two different languages, Albanian and Macedonian. The response format included multiple choice questions in which the participants were asked to choose the most reasonable answer for them on the given list of options. 35% of patients have taken laxatives with doctor's recommendation, 36% from pharmacists recommendation. Only 17% of patients have taken laxatives without recommendations. 48% of healthcare professionals for constipation treatment recommend use of synthetic laxatives and 51% of them recommend use of natural-based laxatives. The most common pharmaceutical forms of laxatives that pharmacists recommend the most, majority of them, 29% have given herbal tea laxatives and 21% syrup forms of laxatives. Other types of pharmaceutical forms are less given to patients. Pharmacists also have rarely encountered the appearance of side effects in patients during the use of natural laxatives.

**Keywords:** Natural-based laxatives, Constipation, Pharmacists.

## Introduction

Constipation does not have a consensus definition, neither ideal disease markers. Therefore, history and physical examination become the major determinant of the diagnosis. Although physicians and patients may interpret it differently, a widely used definition of constipation by medical personnel is to define constipation as less than three bowel movements per week or according to Rome III criteria. While patients often equate constipation with stool consistency, feelings of incomplete emptying, straining, and urge for defecation [1]. The prevalence of constipation based on the Rome III criteria has been reported at varying levels around the world, from 8.2% to 32.9% [2]. Constipation can be classified as primary (idiopathic or functional) or secondary (iatrogenic or because of organic disease), the latter being more common in older people [3]. The management of constipation comprises of non-pharmacological, pharmacological and complementary therapy to achieve and maintain regular bowel movements free of symptoms. The non-pharmacological therapy includes life style modification as physical activity and bowel training, diet modifications by increasing fluid and fiber intake. The pharmacological therapy includes laxatives such as bulk forming laxatives, stool softeners, osmotic and saline laxatives, stimulant laxatives, and lubricants, as well as the prokinetics agents. Complementary therapy includes olive oil, flaxseed oil, tincture of jalapa, and the probiotics [4].

## Aim

Based on the dynamic lifestyle of people nowadays, the number of patients suffering from constipation is increasing day by day. Therefore this fact increased our interest to see how much is it consumed in pharmacies and how much the pharmacists recommended the use of natural-based laxatives to treat constipation.

## Material and methods

The study was based on a self-administered questionnaire where, part of this study were 76 pharmacists from Municipality of Tetovo. Data were collected from March 3rd, 2020 to March 7th, 2020. The questionnaire was developed in two different languages, Albanian and Macedonian. The response format included multiple choice questions in which the participants were asked to choose the most reasonable answer for them on the given list of options. The frequency of answers and results of the data derived from the research were calculated by Microsoft Excel, version 2019.

## Results

Regarding to the question if the patients who come to the pharmacy take laxatives on their own or they ask for a recommendation from pharmacists, we have achieved these answers: 35% of patients have taken them with doctor's recommendation, 36% of patients have taken laxatives with pharmacist's recommendation. Only 17% of patients have taken laxatives without recommendations. In the question where pharmacists were asked for the type of the laxatives prescribed by doctor or recommended by them mostly of them we have achieved these results: 48% of healthcare professionals recommend use of synthetic laxatives and 51% of them recommend use of natural-based laxatives for constipation treatment. Percentage of answers on the question where pharmacists were asked for the most common pharmaceutical forms of laxatives that they recommend the most, majority of them, 29%, have given herbal tea laxatives and 21% have given syrup pharmaceutical forms of laxatives. Other types of pharmaceutical forms are less given to patients.

Pharmacists were also asked about which one of the natural laxatives including here: *semen Psylli*, *semen Lini*, *Lactulose*, *Folium Sennae*, *Cortex Frangulae*, *Rhamni purshiana*, *Rheum sp*, *Aloe* or any other natural laxative is the most consumed in their pharmacy, by patients. According to the data we obtained, most of the patients, 14%, use *Folium Sennae*, followed by 12% of patients which use *semen Lini* more. 11% of patients consider *Lactulose* as the most effective of the natural laxatives and for the 7% of them, *Aloe* is more beneficial for constipation. Only 4% of patients use *semen Psylli* as laxative. Other laxatives that patients use but, are not included in the answers are *Figs*, with 3% of total percentage. In the question: "Have your patients ever reported side effects from the use of natural laxatives?", of the 76 pharmacists surveyed, majority, 52 of them, answered: "No, patients have not experienced side effects while using natural laxatives". 14 of the pharmacists indicated that side effects have been reported in some specific patients and only 10 of them answered: "Yes, patients have experienced side effects during use of natural laxatives".

## Conclusion

According to the data derived from this research work we noticed that majority of pharmacists and doctors recommend use of natural laxatives and they think that they are the best choice for constipation treatment. Pharmacists also have rarely encountered the appearance of side effects in patients during the use of natural laxatives.

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