

Environmental medicine counselling in daily medical practice: feasibility, demand and benefit

Background: The “Basle environmental medicine pilot project” of 2001 showed that there is a demand for such counselling in Switzerland. This research project was very time and cost intensive, and could no longer be financed. A group made up of members of “Doctors for the Environment” has now implemented an environmental medicine counselling structure embedded into daily medical practice. The counselling structure will be modelled on a simplified form of the Basle project. So far it is unclear how many persons will ask for this type of counselling and whether they will find it helpful.

Aims: The scientific monitoring of the counselling project, concentrating on investigation in connection with electromagnetic fields, should clarify the need for such a counselling structure. A record will be kept of who sought advice e.g. members of the general public, doctors, specialist agencies, etc., the nature of the requests, and whether investigatory and counselling measures were initiated. In particular, we will evaluate which investigatory and counselling measures are considered to be most beneficial. It will also be evaluated whether environmental medicine counselling can replace interventions which previously proved ineffective for the persons concerned.

Methods: We will use record sheets, questionnaires and interviews to collect our data. On the basis of a record sheet, the environmental medicine central office will record all persons contacting them and the reasons behind their enquiry. If doctor's advice is sought, questionnaires will be used prior to and after the visit(s). Approximately a year after the counselling, we will conduct a further inquiry into whether the situation had improved and which elements of the counselling had proved to be beneficial. The physician's experience with the project will be qualitatively summarised by means of interviews.

Expected results: This study will be the first in Switzerland in which patients receive environmental medicine investigations and counselling, embedded in daily medical practice. This can be longitudinally tracked.

As this project will analyse data from a series of cases, ultimately no conclusions can be drawn regarding causality of an association between exposures and health complaints.

Within the scope of this project we will be able to determine if there is a need for an environmental medicine consulting office, whether it is feasible and whether the affected persons found it helpful.

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