

# **Health needs assessment in low income patients assisted by pharmaceutical charitable organisations: a preliminary survey based on the analysis of drug dispensation**

S. Bini<sup>1</sup>, G. Fiorini<sup>2</sup>, P. Bertazzi<sup>1</sup>, A.E Rigamonti<sup>1</sup>, S.G. Cella<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dept. of Clinical Sciences and Community Health, University of Milan, Italy

<sup>2</sup>General Hospital, Crema, Italy

Understanding a given population's health status is crucial in order to improve the efficiency of available healthcare services and is particularly important when adequate medical treatment is more difficult to obtain, such as in a vulnerable population. We performed a health needs assessment of the low income population cared for by the 'Banco Farmaceutico' (BF), an Italian non-profit organisation that supplies medicines for many charities. To do so we analysed drug dispensation in the first half of 2014. Drug dispensation is an internationally accepted indicator to evaluate a population's psychophysical wellbeing. We have considered appropriate the use of this method of investigation since the data we have are complete regarding the drugs dispensed, but patients are not registered at their access to the centres and no information on their complaints and illnesses are stored and thus currently available. The study population consists of a representative sample of Italian and foreign citizens receiving assistance by the BF. A total of 116.373 subjects were studied. The data collected includes: ATC (Anatomical Therapeutic Chemical) code of the dispensed drugs, number of daily defined dose (DDD) dispensed, number of users and population characteristics. Adult males and migrants constituted the majority of the user population, and the most dispensed drugs were those for the respiratory system. Of all patients, 40% presented with a chronic problem and more than half needed polypharmacy. Users seek help spontaneously in 70% of the cases, while fewer are referred by social services (16%), accident and emergency (10%) or general practitioners (4%). Centres were able to meet 80% of the existing demand. Patients that could not be managed were referred to local hospitals or collaborating doctors and reasons were explored. To our knowledge, this is a first attempt to characterise and study a vulnerable population served by charitable pharmaceutical services, particularly on Italian territory. Overall, our work confirms that data concerning drug use and prescription can be the basis for specific health interventions and are likely to represent the only source to assess and monitor health needs in such patients.