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Letter to the editor

Influenza and SARS-CoV-2 vaccinations adherence after liver transplantation during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic (results of a patients' survey)



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Influenza and more recently SARS-CoV-2 vaccinations are recommended in organ transplant recipients [1, 2] and is covered by health system in France. A usual major limitation of vaccinations in this population is the poor patients' adherence and lack of interest. We reported that influenza vaccination rate was high (65%), and increased when compared to the year before, in a population of liver transplant (LT) recipients, in 2020, the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic [3]. At that time (winter 20–21 in France), SARS-CoV-2 vaccine started to be available. The proportion of patients willing to be vaccinated (or already vaccinated) against Covid-19 was higher in patients vaccinated against influenza, compared to non-vaccinated (95% vs. 72%, $p < 0.05$). The objective of the present study was to evaluate the adherence of the same large cohort of LT recipients to both influenza and SARS-CoV-2 vaccinations, during the second winter of Covid-19 pandemic, based on a questionnaire survey sent by Short Message Service.

A cohort of adult LT patients, transplanted between 2000 and 2020, followed in 3 transplant centers (Lille, Lyon HEH and Villejuif) was enrolled. Patients had to have had a contact with their transplant center during the year 2021, and a recorded phone number for sending a questionnaire by text message (Calmedica's Memoquest Platform). Demographic and clinical data were available from patients' medical records. The questions concerned Covid-19 disease and vaccinations (and possible reasons for non-vaccination), for the winter 2021/2022 campaign. Patient consent was systematically obtained. The questionnaire was sent in December 2021 to a total of 1352 patients (Lille 34%, Lyon HEH 28% and Villejuif 38%). The positive response rate (agreement and response to the questionnaire) was 38.9%. The majority of the participating patients were male (70%), median age 61.0 years (mean 57.7 years), and the median length of transplantation was 6.9 years. The main indication for LT was alcohol-related liver disease (34.4%). The proportion of patients who presented a Covid-19 infection was 13%. The suspected mode of contamination was familial (39%) or hospital (14%). The hospitalization

rate was 29% (intensive care 9%). The proportion of patients willing to be vaccinated (or already vaccinated) against influenza for the 2021/2022 campaign was 78%. The proportion of the patients who were vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2 was 97%. The main reasons for non-vaccination were: 43% fear side-effects, 22% think the vaccine is ineffective and fear side-effects, and 14% never get vaccinated. Gender, age, age of transplantation and initial indication for transplantation (alcohol vs. other) were not significantly associated with SARS-CoV-2 vaccination or not. The proportion of patients willing to do regular Covid-19 vaccine booster shots if recommended was 74%. The proportion of patients willing to be vaccinated (or already vaccinated) against influenza was significantly higher in patients vaccinated against Covid-19, compared to non-vaccinated (80% vs. 33%, $p < 0.05$ Chi-2 test).

In conclusion, the results of this French cohort with a very good participation rate show a very good influenza vaccination rate (78%), with a quite probable "stimulating" effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, for the second consecutive year (65% in 2020/2021 vs. 57% in 2019/2020). Not surprisingly, adherence of LT recipients to SARS-CoV-2 vaccination was massive. It was also the case for vaccine booster shots. Tharmaraj and coll. in Australia performed in a population of kidney transplant recipients an early survey (March/April 2021) assessing willingness to be vaccinated, attitudes toward Covid-19 vaccines, and barriers and enablers to proceeding with vaccination [4]. They found that "only" 73.1% of the patients planned to receive vaccination, 22.2% were undecided, and 4.7% refused vaccination. Patients in undecided group were significantly younger and were less positive toward (34.29% vs. 91.3%) and more concerned about vaccination (93.3% vs. 25.1%). Their concerns related to vaccine safety (including harm to their transplant), poor efficacy, and a lack of rigorous testing in transplant recipients, recalling part of our results. Undecided recipients had received less vaccine-specific information from medical specialists, but most undecided participants (95.1%) were willing to proceed with vaccination with appropriate supports,

including specific recommendations and vaccine information provided by their transplant specialist/team. This strongly confirms that efforts can be made to educate transplant recipients who refuse vaccination. Is it so different than in the general population?

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Jérôme Dumortier*
Sébastien Dharancy

Thomas Bréard
Faouzi Saliba
Fédération des Spécialités Digestives, Hospices civils de Lyon, Hôpital Edouard Herriot, Lyon
Service d'hépatologie, Hôpital Claude Huriez, CHRU Lille, Lille
Centre Hépatobiliaire, Hôpital Paul Brousse, AP-HP, Villejuif, France

*Corresponding author.

E-mail address: jerome.dumortier@chu-lyon.fr (J. Dumortier).

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