## Pharmacists' attitude to flu vaccination

Qualitative study report

June, 2023

### **Table of contents**

| + Research objectives and methodology                               | s.2  |
|---|------|
| + Flu vaccines at pharmacies  | s.17 |
| Conclusions and recommendations                                     | s.18 |
| <ul> <li>Vaccines from the point of view of a pharmacist</li> </ul> | s.20 |
| <ul> <li>Patient profile and vaccination recommendation</li> </ul>  | s.24 |
| Pharmacists' knowledge  | s.28 |
| Expectations of manufacturers                                       | s.32 |

### Research objectives and methodology

## RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Sanofi Pasteur is the manufacturer of the Vaxigrip Tetra vaccine.

From the moment when flu vaccines can be administered at pharmacies, the importance of effectively reaching pharmacists with information and promotion has become even more important.

The following study aims at understanding pharmacists' attitudes – their values, beliefs, needs and expectations so that the Sanofi Sales Team can work with them more effectively.



#### **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted by means of individual interviews (IDIs) conducted online.



#### **SCREENING CRITERIA**

The study was conducted among pharmacists working at pharmacies which offer flu vaccination.



#### 9 IDIS

with dispensing pharmacists

#### **FIELDWORK**

LOI



60 min

2



### Conclusions and recommendations

### Pharmacists can play a more significant role in recommending vaccines than now, but they need educational support

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

- Interview participants (pharmacists working at pharmacies with vaccinating points) are getting ready for the next flu immunisation season.
- The study results show that the pharmacists' knowledge about risks related to flu, to immunisation, and particular vaccines is very limited.
- Most flu vaccine patients have been choosing it for years. These are mostly individuals over 50, and at the same time the number of flu cases this season was particularly high.
- Pharmacists assume a passive approach to the vaccination topic they answer questions asked by patients, but they do not initiate the topic themselves, they do not proactively encourage patients to get immunised.
- Pharmacists are afraid of patients with a sceptical or reluctant attitude to vaccination. They are afraid to discuss this topic with patients. They feel insecure, incompetent.
  - Pharmacists are not a homogenous group they have different needs, expectations, approach

### **ACTIONS**

Pharmacies with vaccinating points should be within the area of Sanofi interest.

Education and support for pharmacists working at vaccinating points are indispensable.

It is important to make pharmacists aware of/remind them about the flu risk in younger age groups (complications, costs, work absenteeism)

Pharmacists, along with physicians, could become a group actively promoting immunisation in the society. It is crucial for them to notice their own potential and importance of this role.

Workshops, Q&A scripts are needed. This will help pharmacists get ready for conversations which now seem to be a challenge.

When planning the communication strategy, it seems advisable to work on several variants both in terms of content and reach channels to adjust activities to a given pharmacist

# Vaccination from the pharmacists' point of view



### Vaccination from pharmacists' point of view



### Opportunity

to increase one's own competencies, but also prestige of the profession, by managing pharmaceutical care in practice



### Challenge

by leaving the comfort zone of the counter. Change of the role from a salesman to a healthcare professional



#### Fear

related to new duties, the lack of experience, or potential confrontation with anti-vaxxers



### **Uncertainty**

if the time devoted to training and money spent on adapting the pharmacy to the new function will pay off

### Due to a large number of variables, for some pharmacists' vaccination points at their pharmacy might be related to a significant budget risk

Barriers to immunisation at pharmacies

"I do not like stocking vaccines at the pharmacy because I never know what the demand will be, and there is a high risk that they will expire, will not be used, etc." A pharmacist "I must admit that many people have such a mental barrier, and they refuse to do it, as they have some beliefs and have an issue with it." A pharmacist



# Barriers to running immunisation at a pharmacy





#### **Technical and personal barriers**

- The reluctance among some pharmacists to assume new competencies, but also fear of administering injections
- The need to get a prescription from a physician first before getting immunised – this barrier can be eliminated when pharmacists are entitled to prescribe vaccines
- No grassroot (run by pharmacists) initiative promoting flu vaccination among a larger group of patients – now chiefly regular patients are encouraged.

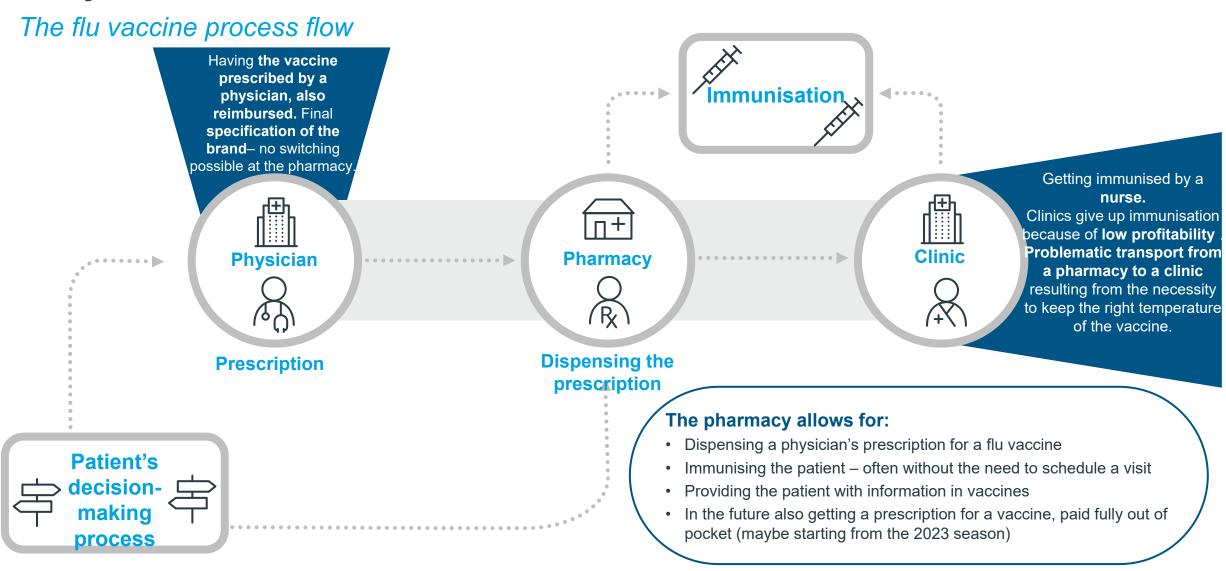
- Problems with vaccine distribution limit immunisation especially at the beginning of the season, combined with negative experience from the past with vaccine disposal
- Pharmacies face understaffing, which is related to limited time that can be devoted to managing each patient
- Now as of May 2023 no new training for pharmacists wishing to get a certificate to entitling them to immunise patients



### Knowledge vs recommendation

Pharmacists do not feel sufficiently comfortable with their knowledge to polemicise with anti-vaxxers or to recommend vaccination to random patients visiting their pharmacies. Chiefly regular patients whose medical history is known to a given pharmacist are encouraged to get immunised – patients 50+.

# Transferring prescriptions and immunisation to pharmacies accelerates the process by eliminating the need for a patient to visit many venues



# Patient profile and vaccination recommendation

### "When looking at the patient profile, I can assess who a potential candidate for a vaccination is and who is not." A pharmacist

### Patient profile





Regardless of the type and location, immunisation at a pharmacy is selected by **regular patients**, who account for a far higher proportion at pharmacies located within housing estates.





A patient coming to a pharmacy for a vaccine is **determined to get vaccinated**. Prior to buying the product, they have visited a physician to obtain a necessary prescription (which can change from the coming 2023 immunisation season). Such a patient **does not need to be encouraged** to get vaccinated.

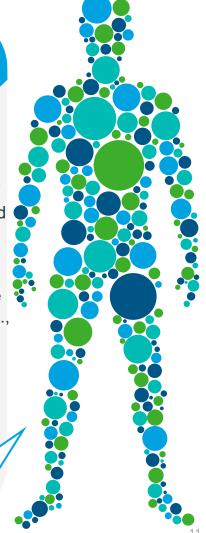
A typical patient is aged **over 50** afraid to fall ill, has been immunised for several seasons, is known to the pharmacy staff, because they regularly buy medications for their chronic conditions.



Even though seniors account for the majority of patients getting immunised at a pharmacy, young patients also come from time to time – these are mostly students and those who work with people (e.g., teachers). According to pharmacists this group chooses vaccines out of fear of falling ill.

"These are rather older individuals, as young ones do not get immunised. But generally, there is more interest than in previous years. People were a little afraid to fall ill in general." A pharmacist

Patient profile: "Chiefly seniors, as you know that it is the most disciplined prolife" A pharmacist



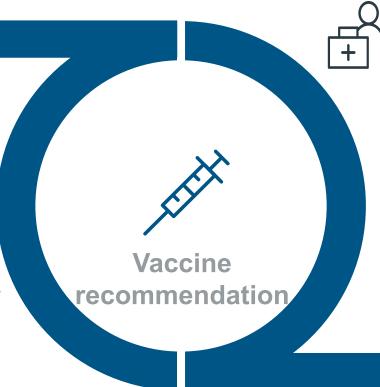
### Pharmacists rarely recommend flu vaccination, and even if they do, such recommendations are given to patients aged over 50

Recommending flu vaccination – pharmacist's point of view



### Pharmacists do not recommend vaccination to young people

- One of the reasons for not doing it is the fear of confronting anti-vaxxers
- To some pharmacists the key problem is the lack of knowledge – they do not have in-depth information.
- Some respondents believe that younger patients do not need such vaccines.



### Pharmacists recommend vaccination to individuals aged over 50

- Older people have more positive attitude to the vaccination topic – easier communication,
- These are often regular patients who have established a relationship with the pharmacy personnel,
- Pharmacists see the sense in immunising this group because of their comorbidities which is why the recommendation is easier.

"When it comes to convincing patients directly to get immunised – I can tell you that it is rather difficult, as there is a large group of anti-vaxxers and during the first interview, based on my 20 years of experience in this business, I know more or less what a given person's attitude is and who is positive or negative about vaccines." A pharmacist

### A discussion about the vaccine with a patient is limited to organisational issues

Pharmacists' conversations with patients about vaccines

#### **Initiating the topic**

The topic of a flu
vaccination is initiated by
the patient – by asking a
question if they can get
immunised



### What questions?

Patients ask technical/organisational questions (if the immunisation must be scheduled in advance, if they must have a prescription, etc.)



#### **Brands?**

Pharmacists rather do not discuss vaccine brands with patients, they only inform on availability.



#### Who?

Patients interested on the topic ask about vaccination, these are often individuals who get immunised every year.

A pharmacist

66



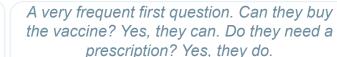
#### **Additional information**

Pharmacists additionally inform patients on possible qualification of the immunisation or the way they may feel afterwards.





When a patient comes, they have seen that they can buy a vaccine here. Many people were interested in it right away. So, we just continued the topic, but generally... not to convince.







Sometimes they ask which one is better, but these are only single cases, and then I say that both are equally good I do not feel I am an expert in this field.

A pharmacist



Now when talking to patients about vaccination, pharmacists assume a passive approach. They have neither the experience nor knowledge to feel more confident and be more active by initiating the topic or providing patients with pros.

### Pharmacists' knowledge

### Pharmacists know little about flu vaccines available in Poland

Pharmacists' knowledge about vaccines

### Pharmacists' knowledge on flu vaccines available on the Polish market



### General knowledge about immunisation

Pharmacists have **general**, **academic knowledge about vaccines** – their mechanism of action and the need to use them.



#### **Differences between brands**

Pharmacists were unable to point to differences between products or point to advantages or drawbacks of any of them. Pharmacists taking part in the study treat flu vaccines more as a whole category than specific products.



#### **Brands**

The best-known brands include Vaxigrip and Influvac. Both the availability and recognisability of other products are low.



### **Technical aspect**

Pharmacists know how to store vaccines after the purchase and provide patients with such information when they come to have their prescription dispensed.

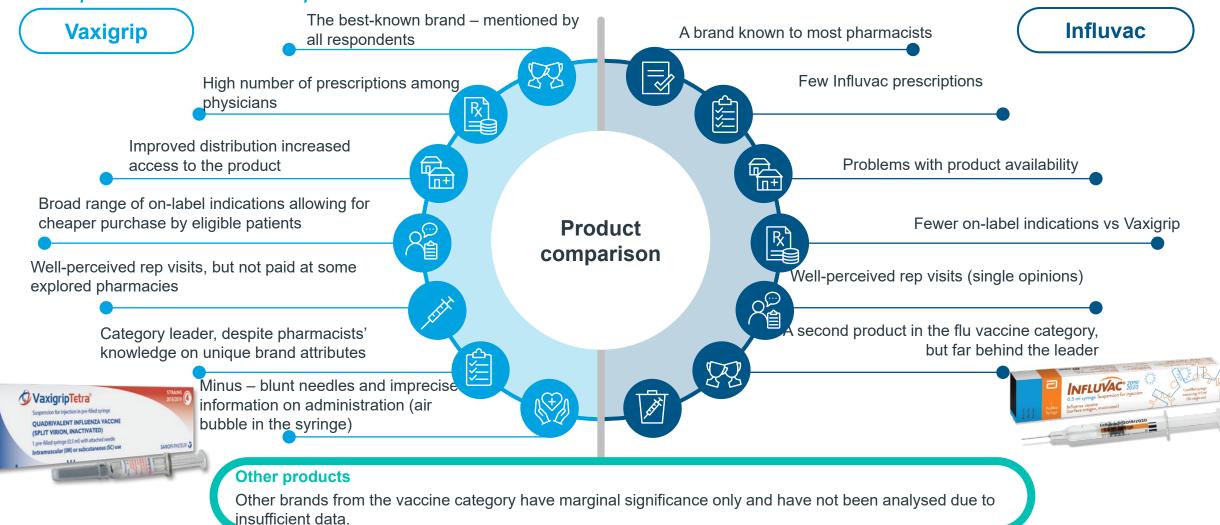


#### No brand recommendations

Even if a vaccine is recommended, a pharmacist does not suggest a specific product. Since vaccines cannot be switched (they are not equivalent) the final choice of the vaccine is made by a doctor who prescribes it In this context, the change starting from the 2023 season seems particularly noteworthy as pharmacies will be authorised to issue prescriptions (this is what pharmacists), which means that the vaccinating process will be optimised.

### Pharmacists taking part in the study are familiar with two flu vaccines, but Vaxigrip is the unquestionable leader.

Vaxirip and Influvac comparison



### **Expectations of manufacturers**

### Pharmacists need educational support on immunisation and flu vaccines. Training is considered effective and is an appreciated format

### Forms of training

### **Offline training**

- Pharmacists taking part in the study stressed the need for offline training.
- The best place for this form of education is their pharmacy, the respondents are less willing to attend meetings outside their place of work, as it requires devoting their private time.
- A short training, focused on practical aspects, run by a company rep was spontaneously mentioned by nearly all pharmacists taking part in the study. They also pointed to advantages of contact with such a person dedicated to their pharmacy.

# Offline **Online**

### Remote training

- Pharmacists stressed the convenience of such a solution, stressing at the same time limited practical aspect. This form is preferred to consolidate/refresh knowledge obtained earlier.
- The main advantage of such meetings is the ability to return to them at a convenient moment which is particularly crucial, given pharmacists' limited time availability.
- Negative approach to obtrusive advertising during online training.
- Educational portals mentioned by the respondents included Pharmaceutical Chamber sites, e-dukacja.pl or postroniepharmacist.pl

"I believe that I like the most such meetings that we are invited to. When a rep tells us about something, asks questions." A pharmacist

### Only single pharmacists remember reps promoting vaccines at pharmacies

Pharmacists' expectations of flu vaccine manufacturers

### Rep's visit

Short meetings, full of content

Pharmacists expect offline
visits combined with
understanding of their
working patterns by reps.
Good relations with a person
visiting the pharmacy
improves brand image.

### **Talk scenarios**

Ready answer to most frequently asked questions

A dispensing pharmacist cannot check knowledge fast.
Due to limited time to respond, it is essential to have ready answers to difficult questions.

### Patient education

Info and promotional campaigns

Pharmacists notice the potential of vaccine manufactures as entities capable of running wide advertising campaigns promoting vaccines – providing patients with information on their role and benefits.

#### **Manuals**

Practical information about the vaccine

Pharmacists have been authorised to immunise patients relatively recently, which is why it is extremely important for them to be provided with practical advice and guidelines by manufacturers, regarding practical aspects of immunisation.

### Materials for patients

Leaflets, brochures, posters

Despite barriers to recommending vaccination among pharmacists, they do notice the need to have info materials on flu immunisation allowing for passive promotion of vaccination.

Why vaccination makes sense, what to say if someone responds, 'I do not get immunised because it makes no sense' or 'someone has told me that it is a terrible thing and that I will go to hell if I go immunised', and then it would be good to have ready answers, as sometimes I my work I just cannot find an argument fast when standing behind the counter, I have a million questions about each topic, sometimes it is not easy." A pharmacist

"Flu vaccine, even when it is paid fully out of pocket, is around PLN 52, and it is a better solution than falling ill with flu and buying many different products that will not help us much, not even mentioning their cost." A pharmacist

### Direct contact with reps is believed by pharmacists to be the best way to communicate with a pharmaceutical company

Sources of knowledge

#### **Contact with reps**

The highest rated form of contact with the firm.

Pharmacists appreciate

the fact that they can obtain information from a person who knows a lot about the product. On the other hand, however, they stressed small number of such meetings

#### The Internet

In their daily work pharmacists treat the Internet as a source of knowledge that can be obtained fast and easily. Websites they use most often include medycyna praktyczna (mp.pl), Pan Tabletka or Pharmindex

#### **Webinars**

Pharmacists pointed to the convenience of this form. On the other hand, however, such meetings are sometimes filled with redundant knowledge, especially when they are run by an academic lecturer

### Local and national training, lectures

Either online or offline training at the pharmacy is preferred



Sources of knowledge

among pharmacists

### Medical/pharmaceutical periodicals

Some pharmacists subscribe printed periodicals, yet they believe them to feature too many obtrusive ads, and sometimes present questionable knowledge from the factual perspective

### **Contact with other pharmacists**

Contact at a pharmacy, but also online, e.g., via. Facebook "Na froncie" group

### **Educational platforms**

Gathering training from various firms



# Work with pharmacists - tailor-made approach

# Pharmacists are not a homogenous group – to work with them effectively, it is necessary to adjust the style and communication to the needs of a given person

The key variables affecting expectations, needs and ways of working with a given pharmacist

### Pharmacists' personality

E.g., keeping distance vs friendly, cordial approach.

### Values and beliefs related to work

E.g., sense of mission vs focus on effectiveness Sense of fulfilment vs disappointment/frustration

### Style of interaction with patients

E.g., partner relation vs bossiness Openness to talking to patients vs reluctance to talk



#### **Educational needs**

E.g.,. Scientific type (detailed, in-depth information) vs practical type (ready-to-use algorithms, protocols, key information)

### Preferred channels of communication

E.g., Traditionalist (f2f relations, offline training, print-outs) vs Modern (digital, webinars, SM)

### **Approach to REPs**

E.g.,. Partner relation (advisor, someone who can help) vs business relation (trade offers, limited trust in knowledge provided)

### Some pharmacists are sceptical about vaccines – the intensity of that scepticism may vary

#### Different attitudes to flu vaccines



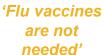
They got vaccinated themselves, they had their children and parents immunised, too.

They are convinced that a flu vaccine is good for everyone.

'Everyone should get immunised' **Immunisation** enthusiasts/ambassadors



They do not consider flu dangerous; they do not believe it necessary to get immunised against it.





dangerous!" ('Anti-

vaxxers')

'Flu vaccination are important only for some groups of patients.'



They are not necessarily immunised themselves, but they agree that older patients, with numerous comorbidities should get vaccinated against flu.



They are strongly against vaccines. This group cannot be easily convinced to actively recommend vaccines, but it is still a good idea to convince them that vaccines are safe, as it will prevent them to some extent from actively discouraging patients from getting vaccinated.

### Scepticism towards vaccines is yet another variable. It is important to understand how to work with 'sceptics' in the context of their other traits

#### **Sceptic Profile 1**

Treats vaccines as a business and a way to boost the prestige of the profession. Will recommend vaccines provided it is beneficial for the pharmacy financially. Will accept factual arguments supporting vaccines.

### **Sceptic Profile 4**

Will rather not recommend vaccines. If their attitude to vaccines is negative, may even discourage patients believing that it can protect them.

An important argument in this group is the question of security of vaccines as such and protecting patients against hazards related to the disease.

#### **Sceptic Profile 2**

Pursues sales goals regardless of their personal beliefs.

Will not discourage patient from getting immunised. Can inform about vaccines even if they are personally not convinced about their indispensability.

#### **Sceptic Profile 3**

Will rather not recommend vaccines actively.

But will also not discourage patients interested in them.

The attitude can be changed with factual arguments or referring to the mission of the profession.