

Letter to the editor

The authors of the Ref. (1) claim that patients with latex allergy should avoid medical support in UK hospitals because of the increased contact with latex allergens in hospitals. Instead they recommend self-treatment.

We agree that patients should feel safe in hospitals. However, the three case presentations do not support the recommendation of self-treatment, because the diagnosis of latex allergy may be questioned and a clear allergen source in the hospital has not been documented. An alternative cause for the complaints of the patients is 'latex-phobia', which may occur in patients with and without latex sensitization.

Patients in Germany are protected by the medical products law (Medizinprodukte-

Gesetz – MPG) which is based on the guiding rule 93/42/EWG of the European Union (EU). This law prohibits circulating medical products which could endanger the health of patients, users and other persons. Furthermore, the EU-guideline 89/686/EWG binds the member states of the EU to do everything to withdraw personal protection equipment which could be hazardous for people. In Germany this EU-guideline was harmonized in the ordinance of personal protection equipment related to the degree of hazardous substances (Gefahrstoffverordnung – GefStoffV). Therefore, powdered latex protection gloves must be substituted by unpowdered latex or latex-free gloves.

If the memberstates of the European Union would harmonize the EU-guidelines in national law, latex-sensitized persons should not have fear going to the hospitals in case of severe allergic symptoms. In our experience the recommendation of self-treatment should not be given to latex-allergic patients in Germany, and we still have some doubt whether it should be given in the UK.

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Reference

1. SPICKETT GP, WRIGHT LJ, GREEN T, GRIX O, STROUD C. Are hospitals safe for latex allergic patients? *Allergy* 2002;**57**:870–871.

Reply

The patients in question have been worked up and we are happy that they have latex allergy not latex phobia. We have no regulations governing exposure to latex, although our Health & Safety Executive have made it clear that they expect hospitals to have robust policies to protect patients and staff who are latex-allergic. We agree entirely that harmonisation of regulations is desirable and believe that adoption of the US requirement to label medical products with regard to their content of latex or otherwise is essential. Until this is instituted, we believe that patients' best interests in carefully selected cases would be best served by management away from hospital.

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