

Correspondence

Indoor allergen assessments: A call for universal standards

To the Editor:

Although fungi are common causes of well described illnesses, as reported in the position paper authored by Bush et al¹ on behalf of the Academy, various professionals and the legal system have promoted mold as a cause of nonspecific ailments in the general population. This has resulted in disagreement and debate among members of the medical community and other professionals, as reflected by the number of letters to the editor, published in the September issue of the Journal, rebutting the position of the Academy regarding the topic.

The high prevalence of allergies in developed countries contributes to the increased public concern about indoor air quality (IAQ). However, the general fear of mold exposure has resulted in an increase in demand for mold assessments, whereas more common and clinically relevant indoor allergens are not typically monitored during IAQ assessments. In addition, although a number of professional organizations provide training and certification for mold inspection and IAQ assessments, expertise and training to monitor and measure other indoor allergens are insufficient. Likewise, certification is not available.

Reference techniques to measure indoor allergens are ELISAs, initially developed at the University of Virginia,² which have been used in many research studies. Although allergen testing has been limited to research settings in the past, the number of commercial laboratories that now offer such testing is increasing in anticipation of an increase in public demand. However, few protocols are recommended for sampling and analysis, and accreditation/quality assurance programs are lacking.

An experimental proficiency program identified a large analytical variation in the measurement of indoor allergens.³ Therefore, standard laboratory operating procedures for sample preparation and analysis and laboratory quality assurance/accreditation programs are necessary. Several groups and organizations also are currently developing equipment for sample collection and producing antibodies to various indoor allergens and antigens and using them to develop assays for research and commercial testing purposes, including the manufacture of kits for home use.

To overcome properly the current caveats in the area of allergen testing, a governmental or not-for-profit regulatory organization should establish a program to assure consistency in the manufacturing of the reagents used in allergen analysis. This organization should also

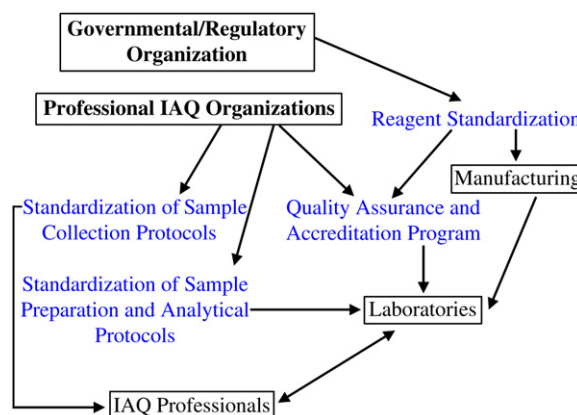


FIG 1. A governmental/regulatory organization should implement rules for reagent standardization and manufacturing. IAQ organizations should provide directives for sample collection and analysis, as well as the certification and supervision of IAQ professionals in the area of indoor allergens.

collaborate with professional IAQ organizations to implement accreditation/quality assurance programs for laboratories that perform allergen testing. The professional IAQ organizations should supervise the laboratory accreditation/assurance programs and develop standard protocols for sampling and analysis. The importance of indoor allergens should be emphasized in the various training programs currently administered by professional organizations to certify individuals in the area of IAQ (Fig 1).

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Disclosure of potential conflict of interest: R. Codina is employed by SDII Global Corporation, a company that performs building assessments. R. F. Lockey has declared that he has no conflict of interest.

Editor's note: There is no accompanying reply to this correspondence.

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