



EPSA Vaccination Awareness Public Health Campaign 2016

Summary Report EU Health Award 2017

1. Introduction & Case Situation

Background

With WHO “European Vaccine Action Plan 2015-2020” being developed and released for the guidance and alignment of the European Countries in preventing and controlling the spread of certain diseases such as: poliomyelitis, hepatitis B, measles, rubella, but also for decreasing the costs of supporting patients that are infected with viruses that cause the previous mentioned diseases, EPSA saw the opportunity and the necessity of pharmacy students’ involvement in raising awareness about the vaccination importance. At the same time EPSA is welcoming the Council’s Conclusions of December 2014 regarding vaccinations as an effective tool in public health and the recent discussion inside the European Commission during the DG SANTE Workshop on 31st of May 2017, as well as the work done by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

The latest report from WHO shows that there are still infections with viruses that can be prevented through vaccination. According to their studies, both infections with rubella and measles increased in 2013. The campaigning against immunization and its benefits, but also the misinformation of the general public, lead EPSA in reinforcing its aim and role in European Society as a pioneer in correctly inform the patients about their rights and benefits in decreasing the burden in contacting a preventable disease.

Acknowledging the remarkable outcomes of vaccinations, as a form of preventing a disease, but also the invalidity or the death that can follow contacting some particular viruses, EPSA is taking into consideration the high-need of informing correctly the general public about the significant advantages they can have if being vaccinated.

EPSA’s past work on vaccination

Public health is at the core of many of EPSA’s activities, as we have a long standing tradition of conducting public health campaigns, coordinated by the EPSA Public Health & Social Services Coordinator, and have also issued several policy papers on public health issues. With 45 member associations representing in total over 160,000 pharmacy students across 37 countries in the Council of Europe region (including all EU Member States), the reach of EPSA is huge and universal in Europe. Pharmacy students represent an active delegation of young and informed people who are eager to conduct public health campaigns both live on the streets and online.

In the 2014 Joint Policy Paper with the European Medical Students’ Association and European Dental Students’ Association on the Spread of Antimicrobial Resistance¹, it was already highlighted that vaccination campaigns should be fully supported as a key prevention measure for AMR as long as they provide a satisfactory benefit-cost ratio.

In June 2015, EPSA released its Position Paper on Pharmacist-delivered Vaccination², highlighting the importance of implementing new services in the community pharmacy setting to enable greater access to vaccines and increase overall immunisation coverage, with the ultimate goal of reaching

¹EDSA EMSA EPSA Paper on the Spread of Antimicrobial Resistance, available at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_E9yOj4w7rrX2dVOUVJbU9CS3c/view

² EPSA Position Paper on Pharmacist-delivered Vaccination, available at: <http://www.epsa-online.org/images/publications/EPSA%20Position%20Paper%20on%20Pharmacist-delivered%20Vaccination.pdf>

the target 75 % immunisation coverage for seasonal influenza, as recommended by the European Council in 2009.

EPSA Vaccination Awareness Public Health Campaign 2016

In 2016, we decided to build on our policy campaign on pharmacist-delivered vaccination, in the context of the growing **vaccination hesitancy and the decreasing rates of vaccination**, with a public health campaign that would share the same core goal: contributing to reach the target of 75 % immunisation coverage for seasonal influenza in Europe, this time through awareness raising for the general public and healthcare students across Europe. This campaign is the topic of our application and shows the **relevance** to the topic of the EU health award 2017 - towards increase vaccination coverage rates and acceptance and confidence in vaccines.

2. Action Proposed

In its Position Paper, EPSA has highlighted the problem that EU Member States struggle to reach a target of 75 % immunisation coverage for seasonal influenza, as recommended by the European Council in 2009. The immunisation coverage for other viruses remains low as well.

The good practice of pharmacists administering flu vaccinations from the UK, Ireland Portugal and Switzerland showed us that it is possible to make a significant improvement. These citizens are very satisfied with the pharmacist-delivered vaccination services, because high quality is ensured and logistical burdens, in terms of arranging an appointment and waiting times at their local GP, are significantly decreased.

EPSA believes that implementing a new service, pharmacist-delivered vaccination, will be an important step forward, ensuring higher coverage and meeting the recommendations. As students, we are ready to accept more responsibilities, if this benefits public health and our citizens. We therefore call for decision-makers to implement proven good practice across all Europe to ensure better health for its citizens.

The main highlights from the position paper:

- Actions to increase the immunisation rate in Europe are needed;
- Pharmacists should contribute to ensure high immunisation coverage and better public health by delivering pharmacy-based vaccination;
- Good examples of the pharmacist-delivered vaccination service should be expanded to all European countries;
- Pharmacists should undergo an appropriate training to ensure the quality, safety and efficacy of the vaccination service.

The EPSA Vaccination Awareness Campaign 2016 focused on proposing these exact same actions, but also broadened the scope to directly focus on combating vaccination hesitancy, through dissemination of correct information and positive, evidence-based information to the general public and healthcare students.

3. Methodology

The EPSA Vaccination Awareness Campaign 2016 aimed to raise awareness towards the general public about the importance of this effective measure for preventing infectious diseases, invalidity or even death and combating the increasing levels of vaccine hesitancy across Europe. The date of the campaign was chosen to be 17-24 October for two reasons: first because October and November are the priority influenza immunization months in Europe and because on 24th October the World Polio Day is organised. To mark the importance of being vaccinated, EPSA delivered this campaign at European level and its members carried out the campaign at local level at the same time by including specific activities.



EPSA's members were encouraged to participate in the #EPSAchallenge by uploading pictures where they show the 'V' sign with their fingers, accompanied with the text 'I am vaccinated. What is your superpower?' and 'One little step to a huge victory!' During the social media campaign, infographics were shared to educate EPSA members and the general public more about vaccination.

Preparation and development

A meeting with 12 EPSA National Public Health Coordinators (many EPSA member associations have a dedicated national Public Health coordinator which is the direct contact point for the EPSA Public Health & Social Services Coordinator) was hosted in the summer, where the topic and the aims of the campaign were discussed and agreed on, along with several ideas for activities to be included.

Therefore, the main aims were:

- Disseminate the benefits of vaccination at local, national and European level;
- Develop a targeted approach to different social categories;
- Emphasize the role of pharmacists in vaccination delivery.

Based on these aims, we established potential activities, as well as measurable goals which would enable us to correctly evaluate the impact of the activity.

Materials were then prepared by the EPSA Public Health & Social Services Coordinator in collaboration with the Public Relations Department and were disseminated within our membership, with the possibility for them to translate it and use it at local level.

The following materials were created:

- **Campaign poster and Facebook cover**

The main aim of these was raising awareness about the campaign, gathering the attention of the wider population.

- **Leaflet**

The leaflet was divided in several parts: the first one, offering an overview on what vaccines are and how they work and providing a list of diseases which can be prevented with vaccines, followed by a list of frequently asked questions and myths about vaccines which were clarified and lastly a list of interesting facts about vaccination.

The leaflet was translated in the local language, targeting the general public and offering them all the basic information about vaccination, while at the same time offering a question-based approach meant to address personal concerns and increase trust.

- **Promotional video**

The video³ was composed of several members of the EPSA Team saying the phrases *"I am vaccinated. What is your superpower? One small step to a huge victory!"* The aim was giving a personal example and emphasising the immense contribution of vaccines to maintaining the health of the population.

It was also shared through Youtube channels of some of our members, such as the British Pharmaceutical Students' Association (BPSA).

- **Infographics**

During the campaign, several infographics from leading public health authorities such as WHO and ECDC were posted with the official EPSA Facebook account and shared by many pharmacy students, enabling that these infographics also were reaching general public.

³ Promotional video made by the EPSA Team, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ym1EEjzHRQ>

- **Blog article for Vaccines Today**

In order to have a wider reach to spread our messages we agreed on a collaboration with Vaccines Today⁴, an online platform for discussing vaccines and vaccination, having as target audience the general public and others with an interest in immunisation. Vaccines Today is an initiative from Vaccines Europe, who represent the voice of the major European vaccine companies. This collaboration therefore shows the **intersectional collaboration** aspect of this campaign. EPSA wrote a blog article⁵ on their website on the key messages of the campaign and the EPSA Position Paper on Pharmacist-delivered Vaccination, whilst also inviting the general public and other stakeholders to participate in the #EPSAChallenge on social media in order to obtain a maximal social media reach.

Online activities

During the week of the campaign, 17th – 24th of October, in conjunction with the World Polio Day, pharmacy students were encouraged to engage with EPSA online in awareness raising activities over social media.

The main activities which were delivered were:

- Sharing the campaign materials, such as poster, video and the leaflet;
- Sharing the infographics and posts on the EPSA Social Media Channels;
- Disseminating the EPSA Position paper on Pharmacist-delivered vaccination;
- Engaging in #EPSAChallenge, by posting pictures on social media with the fingers in a V sign.

These activities were complementary to each other, as some were aimed at effectively disseminating out campaign, while others built on that and provided information to the general public.

4. Results

Through this campaign, EPSA opened the path for its members and other healthcare student organisations to tackle the emergent issue of vaccination hesitancy.

In order to have clear goals, we created SMART goals for this campaign being:

- Have at least 1 partner to support our campaign;
- Reach at least 8.000 people on social media through our posts;
- Engage at least 5 local associations to deliver the campaign;
- Reach at least 100 views on Youtube.

Social media impact

In addition to these numbers, the Tweets of Vaccines Today on promoting the Blog article got in total an extra 628 impressions and 20 engagements.

It was one of the first times creating a Youtube video for a public health campaign, which proved to be an excellent choice as it gathered numerous views and attracted a lot of attention. In addition to this, the #EPSAChallenge was an effective way to mobilise our audience and according to the pictures received from EPSA members, a number of 286 pharmacy students got engaged in this activity.

Local Dissemination

Out of our members, several chose to implement the campaign at a local level, bringing it closer to patients and to the general population. They were provided with materials, which they translated to their own language and they were encouraged to approach the general public and to partner with community pharmacies where they could distribute the leaflets and provide information to patients.

⁴Vaccines Today, available at <https://www.vaccinestoday.eu/>

⁵ Vaccines Today, available at <https://www.vaccinestoday.eu/stories/students-launch-vaccine-campaign/>



The countries engaging in the live public health campaigns were Austria, France, Romania and Turkey. Among the activities performed were:

- Engaging in multidisciplinary collaboration by delivering joint lectures with medicines students;
- Organised workshops for students to prepare them on counselling people who are hesitant about vaccines;
- Approaching people in a public setting to deliver leaflets and to debunk myths surrounding vaccines.

Most of the activities were focused on increasing the level of health literacy among the population, as well as better preparing students for their role in public health, which are both activities with a long-lasting effect, ensuring the **sustainability** of the campaign.

The campaign was translated at local level in 4 countries (Austria, France, Romania and Turkey), with activities focusing mostly on increasing the health literacy of the population and educating students on their future role. This shows that this campaign has reached general public in very different geographical areas in Europe and proves the **transferability** of this campaign.

Our activities also persuaded members who were not active yet on the topic of vaccine hesitancy, to consider organising public health campaigns on this topic in the upcoming year, with all materials still made available for them.

The other EPSA members shared the materials on social media, having EPSA official accounts as example.

5. Conclusions

For being the first edition of the EPSA Vaccination Awareness Campaign, the high impact on social media and the conduction of this campaign at local level in different geographical areas make us proud to say that we have strongly exceeded our own prior set SMART goals and expectations. We believe that this campaign is in many ways **innovative** and **creative**, as we are the first European healthcare student organisation conducting a European wide campaign on vaccination awareness, whilst also we have used today's most effective communication tools and designed most of our own materials.

It's hard to make statements on the **effectiveness** of this campaign to contributing to the ultimate goal of combating vaccine hesitancy and as a consequence reaching a higher immunisation rate across Europe, as this could not be measured during the campaign. However, we are very happy with the gathered results and see high scope for further developing this campaign, engaging more local member organisations, more external stakeholders and targeting our strategy even more to the general public. We believe that reaching the vaccination coverage targets in Europe can only succeed through a multidisciplinary mind-set, which will require different healthcare professionals to work as one aligned team centred around the patient. Finally, we will also explore the possibility of engaging with professional pharmacist associations as we would like to have our campaign materials spread through local community pharmacies as well.

We would like to conclude with the message that we as European pharmacy students will always, being it during our education or later in our profession, having the increase of immunisation rates across Europe at the core of our work. Our efforts are not stopping with the end of this campaign, on the contrary we see the results of this campaign as a huge motivation boost to bring this project to the next level and to place ourselves in combating vaccine hesitancy across Europe.

We thank you for considering our application.