Anaphylaxis in 939 patients aged 65 or more: data from Germany, Austria and Switzerland

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Background and Aim: Anaphylaxis in children and adults differs with regard to elicitors and clinical picture. Little is known about anaphylaxis in elderly patients. We aimed at characterizing typical features of anaphylaxis in this group of patients.

Methods: Data from the Network for Online Registration of Anaphylaxis (NORA) were analyzed for German speaking countries (Germany, Switzerland and Austria). We compared data from patients aged ≥65 (elderly) with data from patients aged 18-64 (main adult group) in terms of elicitors, clinical symptoms, comorbidities and emergency treatment.

Results: Between July 2007 and March 2016, anaphylaxis was registered in 939 elderly and 4665 of other adult patients. Insect venom was the most frequent trigger in both groups (elderly: 60% vs. adults: 52%), followed by drugs (24% vs. 21%) and food items (10% vs. 17%). Within the group of insects yellow jacket (72% vs. 73%) and in the group of drugs analgesics (38% vs. 40%) were the most common elicitors. For food anaphylaxis hazelnut (16%) was the most frequent elicitor in the elderly, and wheat (16%) in the other adults. Cardiovascular symptoms were slightly more prevalent in the elderly (77% vs. 73%) and the reactions are more severe with 46% (36% compared to other adults) experiencing a grade III/IV reaction. Noteworthy, 60% of the elderly had a preexisting cardiovascular comorbidity compared with 18% of the other adults. First line treatment by professionals included mainly corticosteroids (89%) and antihistamines (82%) in both groups. Epinephrine was only used in 24% (elderly) versus 19% (other adults).

Discussion and Conclusion: Compared to adults aged below 65 years, the symptom pattern in the elderly was characterized by cardiovascular symptoms and more severe reactions. Epinephrine was used more frequently in the elderly compared to younger adults but was still only used in less than one out of four patients.