

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Dear editor,

I read “Research of urgent biochemistry test ordering habit” with great interest. The authors have applied statistics in order to transform a “common secret” into quantitative evidence illustrating its impact on the medical community of the University Hospital of Edirne. I paid special attention to the causes of ordering superficial laboratory investigations and I would like to underline the potential impact of the so-called defensive medicine (DM) on this kind of medical practice.

DM consists of a contemporary tendency in clinical practice. The two main types of DM are positive and negative DM. In the first case, doctors tend to overuse diagnostic procedures including laboratory testing and imaging in order to avoid missing any potential diagnosis. In the second case, doctors avoid performing risky medical procedures (i.e. surgical operations, invasive techniques etc) so as not to commit a medical error. The elevated biochemistry test ordering could be linked to positive DM (1).

Several synchronic studies as well as personal narratives – letters have indicated the impact of DM so far. Studdert et al. (2) investigated 800 physicians’ responses indicating that 92% of them were prone to positive DM and 42% practiced negative DM in order to minimize the risk of complications. In a survey of Gallup and Jackson Healthcare in 2010, it was found that physicians in private healthcare tend to practice DM more than physicians in state institutions (3). Rodriguez et al. (4) study in 2007 suggested a high prevalence of 50% of DM among emergency physicians in California from 2001 to 2005.

All in all, defensive medicine is considered as a negative aspect of contemporary medical practice. Although safety is highlighted, the rationale of DM is structured on personal feeling or anxiety rather than evidence-based medicine (5).

However, most of the available studies have been conducted in the US, where the attitude of physicians is

influenced by the high frequency of malpractice suing. To the best of our knowledge, there is not adequate evidence about this phenomenon in the Balkans region and it would be very interesting if this parameter could be evaluated in a future version of Elmaci et al.’s study.

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