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Terms, concepts, barriers and treatment practices towards childhood cough and asthma in rural Greece: a qualitative FRESH AIR study.

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Applied Clinical Research/Implementation Science Results Abstract

Aim: In low-resource areas, acute asthma may be under-diagnosed in children under 5 years old (U-5s) presenting with a coughing disease, resulting in inappropriate treatment, prolonged illness and increased morbidity. To improve respiratory diagnoses in U-5s, knowledge of the local context is required. This study aims to explore terms, perceptions, barriers and treatment practices regarding childhood cough and asthma in rural, primary care settings of Crete, Greece.

Method: Theoretical input from the Health Belief Model and the Theory of Planned Behaviour was utilised. Semi-structured interviews were performed with 10 purposively selected caregivers of U-5s with a coughing disease and 10 primary care professionals (pediatricians and general practitioners [GP]). All activities were audio-taped, transcribed and analysed using Thematic Content Analysis.

Results: Caregivers mainly used the term "bronchitis" when referring to their child's coughing disease. Knowledge of asthma was high but half of caregivers reported no actual understanding of the term. Coughing diseases (including asthma) were perceived as severe, attributed to heredity or cold weather and triggered by cigarette smoke and local weather conditions. Barriers to healthcare seeking included inappropriate attitudes of healthcare professionals and medical costs. Most caregivers reported following inhaled medication and visiting a pediatrician or GP of the public sector immediately when symptoms worsen. Healthcare professionals were knowledgeable and well-informed about asthma and other respiratory conditions. Although asthma may be suspected as diagnosis, bronchitis and other simple words may be used to inform caregivers, due to a potential distress caused by the term asthma. Treatment provided for asthma includes β_2 -agonists and corticosteroids, while for other coughing diseases it may include antibiotics. Healthcare professionals identified communities' awareness/(health) literacy as key factors affecting reactions to respiratory diagnoses and overall approach.

Conclusion: These results may contribute to strengthening diagnosis and treatment of respiratory distress in U-5s in rural Crete, enhance healthcare provision, benefit local communities and minimize health inequalities.

Declaration of Interest: This abstract constitutes a proposal for FRESH AIR WP6 workshop.

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FRESH AIR is a three-year implementation science project to improve prevention, diagnosis and treatment of CRDs in low resource settings. It is the first time that this abstract is being submitted to an international scientific meeting.

Co-author Assist. Prof. Dr. Ioanna Tsiligianni serves as IPCRG president-elect.