

2017-12

Investigating possible food allergy in armed forces personnel

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/10742>

CLINICAL AND EXPERIMENTAL ALLERGY

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Title:

Investigating possible food allergy in Armed Forces personnel.

Objectives:

The policy of the Armed Forces is not to recruit or commission personnel with existing medical conditions requiring special diets. If personnel develop food allergy during service they may be unable to be deployed, re-graded or discharged. The objective was to determine whether more investigations are undertaken to confirm a diagnosis of food allergy in Armed Forces personnel due to the impact this has on their career.

Method:

49 patients were identified who were referred for investigation into possible food allergy and were either currently employed by the Armed Forces or undergoing their recruitment process. These were compared to 45 randomly selected non-military referrals. Data was collected retrospectively including clinical history, skin prick tests, specific IgE, oral food challenge, diagnosis and whether injectable adrenaline was prescribed.

Results:

A confirmed diagnosis of food allergy was lower in the Armed forces group (57% vs 82%). All of the Armed Forces group had at least one investigation to investigate possible food allergy whereas 14% of the other group had a diagnosis made based on clinical history alone. 45% of the Armed Forces referrals had an oral food challenge compared with 0% in the non-military group. Of the Armed Forces referrals not diagnosed with food allergy, 76% underwent a negative oral food challenge, often despite positive skin prick tests and specific IgE. 53% of the Armed Forces group had a history of food allergy in childhood.

Conclusions:

More investigations, especially oral food challenges, were undertaken in Armed Forces personnel to clarify the diagnosis of food allergy due to the employment implications. The increased use of oral food challenge in assessing food allergy may lead to fewer patients receiving an exclusion diet.

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