

Perceptions of adolescents and young adults with allergy and/or asthma and their parents on EAACI guideline recommendations about transitional care: A European survey

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Abstract

Background: The European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology has developed a guideline to provide evidence-based recommendations for healthcare professionals to support the transitional care of adolescents and young adults (AYA) with allergy and/or asthma. The goal of this work was to ensure that the draft recommendations are also important for patients.

Methods: We surveyed patients aged 11–25 years with allergy and/or asthma and their parents across Europe between 17 February and 16 March 2020. The multilingual survey was distributed through national allergy and asthma patient organizations in Europe as well as through social media.

Results: A total of 1210 responses from 24 European countries were collected. There were 415 (34.3%) AYA and 795 (65.7%) parents. The majority of AYA (72.3%) and parents (81.9%) were female. Patients had a history of asthma (61.1%), allergic rhinoconjunctivitis (54.1%), food allergy (53.8%), atopic eczema (42.6%) and anaphylaxis (28.8%). All recommendations achieved the median score of either 'important' or 'very important'. The least supported recommendations were the use of joint clinics with both paediatric and adult physicians attending and the use of web-based or mobile technologies for communication with the AYA. The most supported recommendation was checking that the AYA is knowledgeable and compliant with their prescribed medication. Qualitative analysis revealed conditional approval for some recommendations.

Conclusions: There was agreement from patients and parents on the importance of the draft recommendations on transitional care for AYA with allergy and/or asthma and their parents. The recommendations now need to be implemented into clinical practice across Europe.

KEYWORDS

adolescents, allergy, survey, transition, young adults

1 | INTRODUCTION

Transition has been defined as an 'active and evolving process that addresses the medical, psychosocial and educational needs of young people as they prepare to move from child- to adult-centred health care'.¹ Several guidelines on general transitional care have been published by the European Academy of Paediatrics,² Canadian Association of Paediatric health centres,³ American Academy of Pediatrics,⁴ and National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.⁵ Disease-specific guidelines are also available to optimize transition for adolescents and young adults (AYA) with different long-term conditions.^{6–8} Transition programmes have shown significant improvements in patient care during transition leading to low rates of loss of follow-up, high scores for AYA's satisfaction with transition and self-efficacy in managing their disease.⁹

Recently, the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) published the first European guideline on the effective transition of adolescents and young adults (AYA) with allergy and/or asthma.¹⁰ As part of the guideline development process, an online survey was conducted to ensure the

draft recommendations developed by the EAACI Task Force (TF) are important for AYA with allergy and/or asthma and their parents or carers (hereafter referred to as 'parents') across Europe. Involving AYA in refining the European recommendations is an essential step because these are the patients who need to be transitioned and adapt to a new type of care. Understanding what is important to them helps to facilitate a smooth transition, ensure treatment adherence and subsequently improve healthcare outcomes. Parents also play an important role in preparing and supporting adolescents during transition to becoming independent adults. Parents must make a challenging transition themselves from taking full responsibility for their adolescent's healthcare to their child self-managing their disease and becoming a competent patient. It has been shown that assessment of parental perceptions on the transition of AYA with congenital heart defects offered insights into how transition planning could be optimized.¹¹

By obtaining the perspective of AYA's and their parents on EAACI draft recommendations for transitional care, we aimed (1) to evaluate the importance of each recommendation independently

for each group and (2) to identify additional factors that need to be included in the 'other considerations' section of recommendations.

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Study design

A quantitative, online, cross-sectional survey was conducted. The survey (available in the Supporting information) was based on recommendations developed by the members of the EAACI Adolescent and Young Adult TF who come from a range of disciplinary and clinical backgrounds, including allergists (specialists and subspecialists), general practitioners, paediatricians, dermatologists, otolaryngologists, adult physicians, nurses, psychologists and patient representatives. Recommendations are based on the results of systematic reviews on the challenges of AYA with allergic conditions,¹² interventions for these patients¹³ as well as generic transition recommendations from evidence-based guidelines over the last 5 years. In addition, three rounds of a Delphi survey were conducted among TF members in order to achieve a consensus for D level recommendations.¹⁰

2.2 | Participants and data collection

We invited AYA, aged 11–25 with allergy and asthma and their parents across Europe who were able to read English, Dutch, Danish, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French or Russian, to participate in the survey. The survey was distributed through national allergy and asthma patient organizations in Europe (UK, The Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, Germany, Russia, Denmark and France) who then disseminated the link to the survey in SurveyMonkey among their members. In addition, the survey was advertised on social media (eg Facebook, Twitter). Before accessing the questionnaire, potential respondents were informed about the survey's purpose, the organizations conducting the survey and the average time required to complete. Responses were collected between 17th February and 16th March 2020.

2.3 | The questionnaire

The anonymised survey included 24 questions divided between two parts: five questions about demographic information (AYA or parent, age, gender, country and allergic diseases) and 19 questions about the level of importance of each recommendation. Recommendations were divided into five groups, namely (1) generic advice, (2) treatment for allergy and asthma, (3) self-management, (4) psychological issues and help, and (5) support from family, friends and others. Participants were asked to rank the level of importance for each recommendation using a 5-point scale: 1 'Not important', 2 'Slightly Important', 3 'Fairly important', 4 'Important' and 5 'Very Important', plus a 'No opinion' option was available. An average score of at

least 2 was set as the level for acceptance of the recommendation. Options for free-text responses were provided. The wording of the questionnaire was carefully checked to ensure it could be understood by this lay audience, translated into eight languages (English, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Danish, Dutch, French and Russian) and back translated into English to ensure validity and accuracy. Reading age was tested prior to dissemination of the survey to ensure clarity and understanding. A group of target participants also tested the time required to complete the survey, which ranged from 15 to 20 min.

2.4 | Qualitative analysis

Qualitative data analysis was used to summarize free-text comments from AYA and parents. All comments from AYA and parents were analysed separately. Comments in languages other than English were translated by one TF member and checked by a second TF member. Braun and Clarke's steps for thematic analysis were used for analysis.¹⁴ Each comment was coded, and the codes were then combined into themes. In order to ensure that responder views were correctly interpreted, each comment and its code was reviewed in duplicate by patient representatives, clinicians and psychologists from the EAACI TF (EK, GR, CA, RCK, ADG, PC, T. G-B and MHG). Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and, if necessary, a third reviewer (M.V-O) was consulted. Codes were then split based on the direction of the content: supportive, conditionally supportive or non-supportive (Supporting information).

2.5 | Statistical analysis

All data were collected and analysed using SPSS software version 25.0. Descriptive statistics were used to describe respondent characteristics. Medians with lower and upper quartiles are presented for continuous variables given the distribution of the data. Frequency tables with percentages are provided for categorical variables.

A minimum of 50 responders per country was required for the comparison of data between countries. The comparisons were performed by using the Kruskal-Wallis test. Summary tables were used to represent the results. Data were considered significant if statistical tests produce a *p*-value of <0.05.

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Respondent demographics and characteristics

Among 1425 received responses, 215 (16%) were excluded as they were either incomplete or came from outside Europe. A total of 1210 responses from 24 European countries were analysed. The most common countries of residence were Italy (20.7%), Portugal (17.0%), France (15.6%) and Russia (15.4%). There were 415 (34.3%)

AYA and 795 (65.7%) parents. The majority of AYA (72.3%) and parents (81.9%) were female. Patients had a history of asthma (61.1%), allergic rhinoconjunctivitis (54.1%), food allergy (53.8%), eczema (42.6%) and anaphylaxis (28.8%). Most AYA had one (29.7%) or two (26.9%) allergic conditions but 22.0% had more than four allergic comorbidities. Respondents' characteristics are listed in Table 1.

3.2 | Importance of the recommendations on transitional care

All recommendations were (at minimum) scored as 'important' (median score of 4 on the 5-point scale) (Table 2). The most supported recommendation was that of checking that the AYA are knowledgeable and compliant with their prescribed medication, with 68% of AYA and 77.7% of parents reporting this as 'very important'. The least supported recommendations related to the use of joint clinics with both paediatric and adult physicians attending (only 27.7% AYA and 38.1% parents reported this as 'very important') and the use of web-based mobile technologies for communication with the AYA (only 27.0% AYA and 35.6% of parents reported this as 'very important'). In addition to overall data, a sensitivity analysis showed that the results were similar in individual countries with more than 50 responses (Table S1).

Of the 1356 free-text comments received, 978 (72.1%) were made by parents. Summary of the feedback with all themes from AYA and parents may be found in the Tables S2–S19. Figure 1 and Figure S1 show the key supportive, conditionally supportive and not supportive comments for generic recommendations, Figure 2 presents comments on treatment and self-management of allergy, skin disease and asthma and comments on psychological issues and help, and support from family, friends and others are found in Figure 3. In general, AYA's and parents' feedback was similar (Tables S2–S19). There were some notable exceptions such as parents were more likely to comment that transition should start earlier in adolescence (Table S2).

Almost all comments were supportive with a few conditional ones, which were used to improve the recommendations. For example, respondents suggested that a personal action plan should be developed not only when AYA are about to be transferred to the adults' department, but should instead be utilized at an early stage before adolescence. In addition, it was suggested that the action plan should be regularly reviewed by all HCP involved in the individual's care. With regard to motivational interviewing, participants proposed that active involvement of AYA in discussion would improve self-management of asthma and quality of life. Adolescents suggested that conversation about possible stressful life events that may impact disease control should be explored in a very sensitive way, and that psychological interventions using cognitive behavioural therapy to improve adherence, self-management and symptom control are likely to be most effective for specific patients, for example, those struggling to self-manage their condition. Professionals who support those with difficulties, such as psychologists, should have expertise in allergy and asthma. The family should

TABLE 1 Demographics of survey responders

All responders (n = 1210)	Number (%) of responders
Adolescents and young adults	415 (34.3)
Male	115 (27.7)
Female	300 (72.3)
Parents	795 (65.7)
Male	144 (18.1)
Female	651 (81.9)
Type of allergic disease	
Asthma	739 (61.1)
Allergic rhinoconjunctivitis	655 (54.1)
Food allergy	651 (53.8)
Eczema	515 (42.6)
Anaphylaxis	348 (28.8)
Urticaria	248 (20.5)
Drug allergy	132 (10.9)
Venom allergy	68 (5.6)
Number of allergic diseases ^a	
1	359 (29.7)
2	326 (26.9)
3	257 (21.2)
≥4	266 (22.0)
Countries	
Italy	251 (20.7)
Portugal	206 (17.0)
France	189 (15.6)
Russia	186 (15.4)
United Kingdom	103 (8.5)
Spain	71 (5.9)
Denmark	54 (4.5)
Netherlands	46 (3.8)
Germany	26 (2.1)
Ireland	25 (2.1)
Others ^b	53 (4.4)

^aAnaphylaxis is not included as a separate condition.

^bBulgaria n = 1 (0.1%), Greece n = 1 (0.1%), Luxembourg n = 1 (0.1%), Poland n = 1 (0.1%), Romania n = 1 (0.1%), Georgia n = 1 (0.1%), Azerbaijan n = 1 (0.1%), Turkey n = 1 (0.1%), Switzerland n = 6 (0.5%), Kazakhstan n = 3 (0.2%), Belarus n = 6 (0.5%), Ukraine n = 15 (1.2%) and Belgium n = 15 (1.2%).

be enrolled early in the transition process; however, the shift from parent to self-management should be done gradually to support AYA empowerment. Telling friends may be difficult for some and AYA suggested that they should be supported and encouraged to start by talking to a few close friends. Parents added that there should be a balance between autonomy and safety and recognized that it may be challenging for them to reduce control of their child's life.

Key negative comments related to the suggestion that adolescents should learn about self-management before 11 years of age; that the

TABLE 2 The level of importance for each recommendation as regarded by participants

Recommendation	AYA n = 415 Median (IQR)	Parents n = 795 Median (IQR)
Generic advice		
1. Young people should start to learn how to manage their asthma, allergies and skin disease when they are about 11–13 years old	5 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
2. It is important to think about:		
Making sure that clinics have a plan/special document about how to care for young people as they grow up	5 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
Telling the young person and their parents or carers about how the plan will work and how it will change as they grow up	5 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
Using a checklist to find out when the young person is ready to take more responsibilities for their asthma, allergy and skin disease as they grow up	4 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
Checking that the young person is able to and takes the medicines they have been given	5 (4,5)	5 (5,5)
If the young person has to move across from a children's clinic to one for adults, it would be helpful for them to see both children's and adult's doctors in one clinic transiently while they get used to the change	4 (3,4)	4 (3,5)
The doctors and nurses caring for young people in children's and adult clinics should have regular meetings to discuss their care	4 (3,4)	4 (4,5)
3. Doctors and nurses could use web-based and other mobile technologies such as texts or skype to communicate with the young person	4 (3,4)	4 (3,5)
4. It may be helpful for doctors and nurses to talk to young people about how their asthma, allergies and skin disease may affect their social life (eg when being with friends or family), education and career plans	5 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
5. Doctors, nurses and other medical staff should have special training to help young people with asthma, skin symptoms and allergies	5 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
6. There should be regular checks of how well the clinic works to make sure it is effective and helpful for young people	4 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
Treatment of allergy, skin disease and asthma		
7. The doctors and nurses should try to make the young people's treatment easy to follow	4 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
8. Phone reminders, apps and other methods may be useful to help young people to remember their treatment and take more responsibility for looking after their asthma, skin disease and allergies	4 (4,5)	4 (4,5)
Self-management of allergy, skin disease and asthma		
9. A personal action plan covering what to do would help young people manage their asthma, skin disease or allergies	4 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
10. It would be helpful during the hospital visit to focus on issues and ways to manage asthma, skin disease and allergies where the young person is less confident	4 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
11. Young people and their families might want guidance from doctors and nurses on how to manage their asthma, skin disease or allergies when the young person is at social events (eg sports, celebration, holidays)	4 (3,5)	5 (4,5)
12. Young people could learn from other young people with asthma, skin disease and allergies about how to manage their life	4 (3,5)	4 (4,5)
13. Doctors or nurses should have conversations with young people designed to strengthen their motivation and commitment to improving their asthma management	4 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
Psychological issues and help		
14. Doctors and nurses should look out for young people who feel anxious or depressed as these may affect their asthma, skin disease and allergies	5 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
15. Doctors and nurses should find out if young people have experienced stressful events (such as parents' divorce or bullying) which may affect their asthma, skin disease and allergies	4 (4,5)	4 (4,5)

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Recommendation	AYA n = 415 Median (IQR)	Parents n = 795 Median (IQR)
16. A psychologist may be able to help young people to manage their asthma, skin disease and allergies better	4 (3,4)	4 (4,5)
Support from family, friends and others		
17. Families should be encouraged to support young people as they start to manage their asthma, skin disease and allergies	5 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
18. Young people should be encouraged to let their friends know about their asthma, skin disease and allergies and how they can help in an emergency	5 (4,5)	5 (4,5)
19. Clinics should recommend reliable websites and other useful sources of information about asthma, skin disease and allergies to young people	4 (4,5)	4 (4,5)

Note: IQR, interquartile range. Potential responses were 1 'Not important', 2 'Slightly Important', 3 'Fairly important', 4 'Important', and 5 'Very Important', plus a 'No opinion' option was available. AYA, adolescents and young adults.

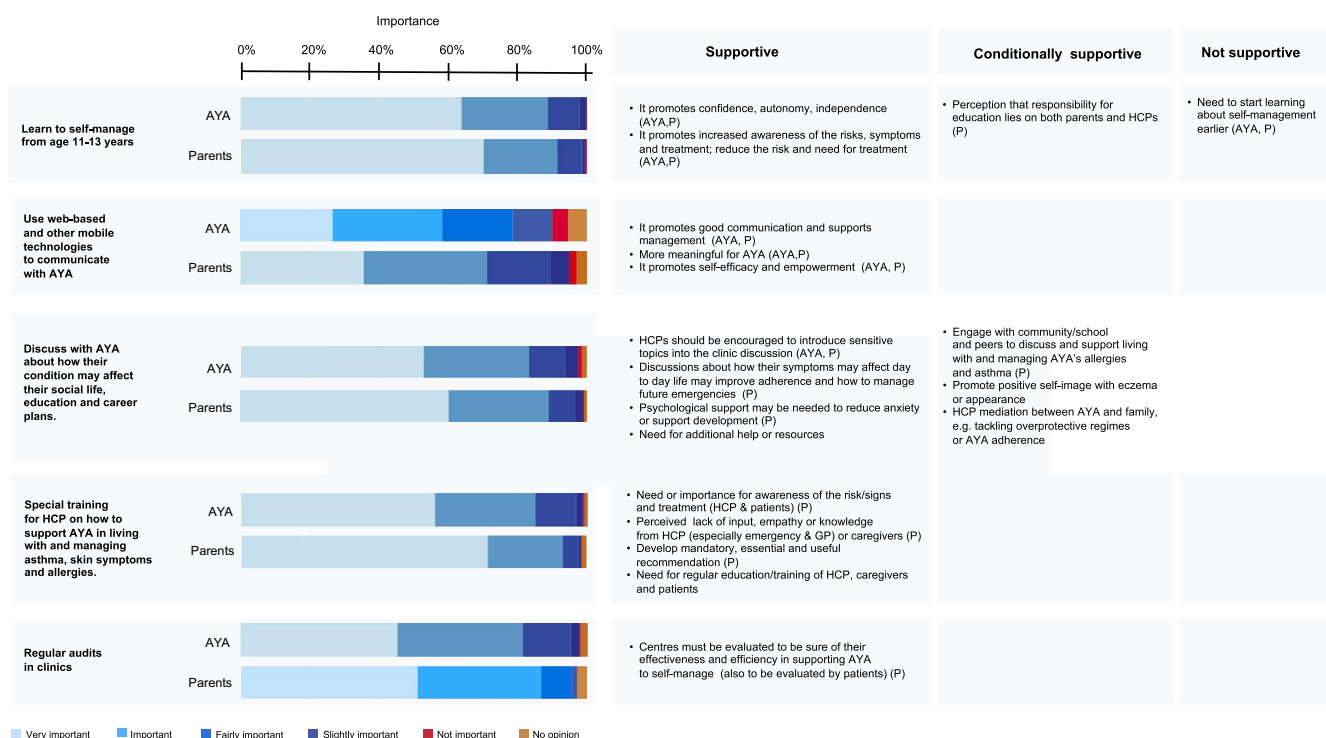


FIGURE 1 Summary of feedback on generic recommendations. AAI, adrenaline autoinjectors; AYA, adolescents and young adults; GP, general practitioner; P, parents; HCP, healthcare professionals. The thematic map includes themes where the total number of comments for each theme ≥ 11 . Information in brackets specifies which group (AYA and/or P) has more than 11 comments in each theme. If none of the groups reported ≥ 11 comments in the theme but it has ≥ 11 total number of comments this theme is also included

use of aids to improve adherence might undermine AYA taking responsibility for their care; and some felt that AYA might not be happy to share the details of their allergic diagnoses with their friends.

4 | DISCUSSION

The findings from this pan-European survey support the value of draft guideline recommendations on the transitional care developed by the EAACI Adolescent and Young Adult Task Force for both AYA

with allergic conditions and their parents (Figure 4). Conducting this survey in different European countries and health systems demonstrated that the recommendations are understood by AYA/parents and remain relevant. The rich qualitative data set of almost 1400 comments and the thematic analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions provided additional insights on their opinions about each recommendation. From this survey, we were able to further refine the recommendations based on the range of supportive, conditionally supportive and minimal number of non-supportive free-text responses.

This survey contributes to the growing literature on the benefits of patient-centred care and understanding of patient perceptions and views for healthcare decision-making.¹⁵ For example, patient-reported experience measures have been used to guide quality improvement across different settings.¹⁶ Moreover, a set of considerations to engage AYA in research have been proposed¹⁷ and several guidelines on transitional care involved this age group and their parents in the development of guideline recommendations.^{6,18}

Survey participants recognized the value of actively monitoring adherence to treatment throughout transition, but did not consider an overlap in care between paediatric and adult HCP to be particularly important. This finding may be because some countries do not have separate paediatric and adult specialists (allergists, dermatologists and respiratory physicians) and care is mostly led by general practitioners or specialists who treat patients of all ages. In contrast, AYA with inflammatory bowel disease rated joint consultation with both HCP as one of the most valuable features of the transition care program.¹⁹ Other methods of communication between HCP and AYA such as web-based, mobile technologies were also considered less important. Research

indicates that AYA generally prefer using web-based methods of communications²⁰ and are less interested in using social media sites for communication with HCP due to privacy concerns.²¹ These two less popular recommendations align with other guidelines, which emphasize the importance of suitable use of technology for interaction between patients and HCP^{1,5,8} and joint consultations.^{8,22}

Limitations inherent in the survey method impacted our ability to investigate possible reasons for our findings. Further qualitative interviews might identify why AYA do not fully support joint care by adult and paediatric HCP or the use of technologies for communication with HCP. Some respondents reported that self-management training should start before 11 years of age. We would agree that is appropriate for some AYA in line with developmentally appropriate healthcare.²³ Some AYA find technological solutions, such as an alarm on a mobile phone, to be very helpful to improve their treatment adherence.²⁴ Additionally, some AYA reported concerns about what their friends might think if they shared the details of their allergic diagnoses with them, although others reported this as a positive experience with AYA receiving considerable support from their close friends.²⁵

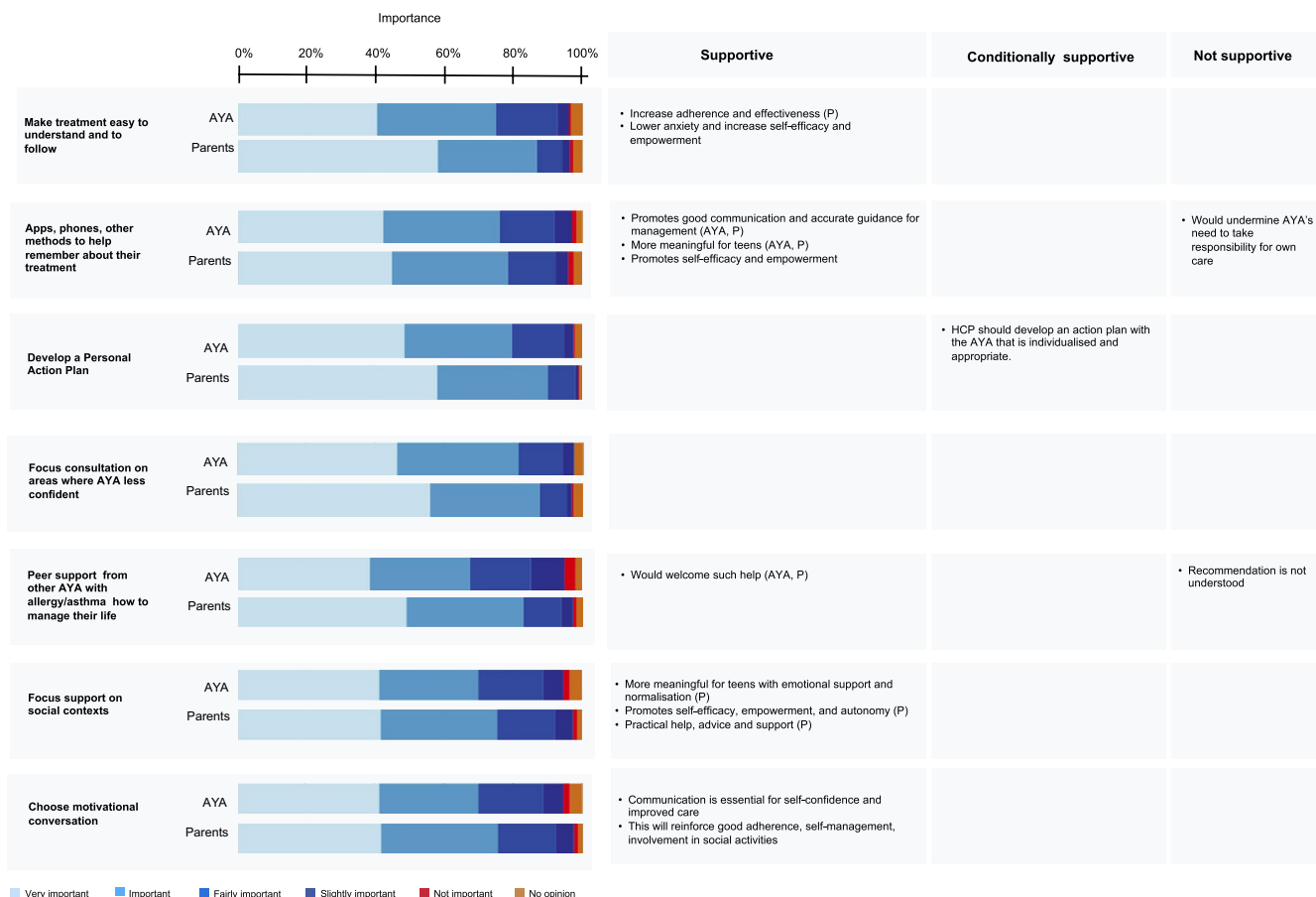


FIGURE 2 Summary of feedback on adherence and self-management recommendations. AAI, adrenaline autoinjectors; AYA, adolescents and young adults; GP, general practitioner; P, parents; HCP, healthcare professionals. The thematic map includes themes where the total number of comments for each theme ≥ 11 . Information in brackets specifies which group (AYA and/or P) has more than 11 comments in each theme. If none of the groups reported ≥ 11 comments in the theme but it has ≥ 11 total number of comments this theme is also included

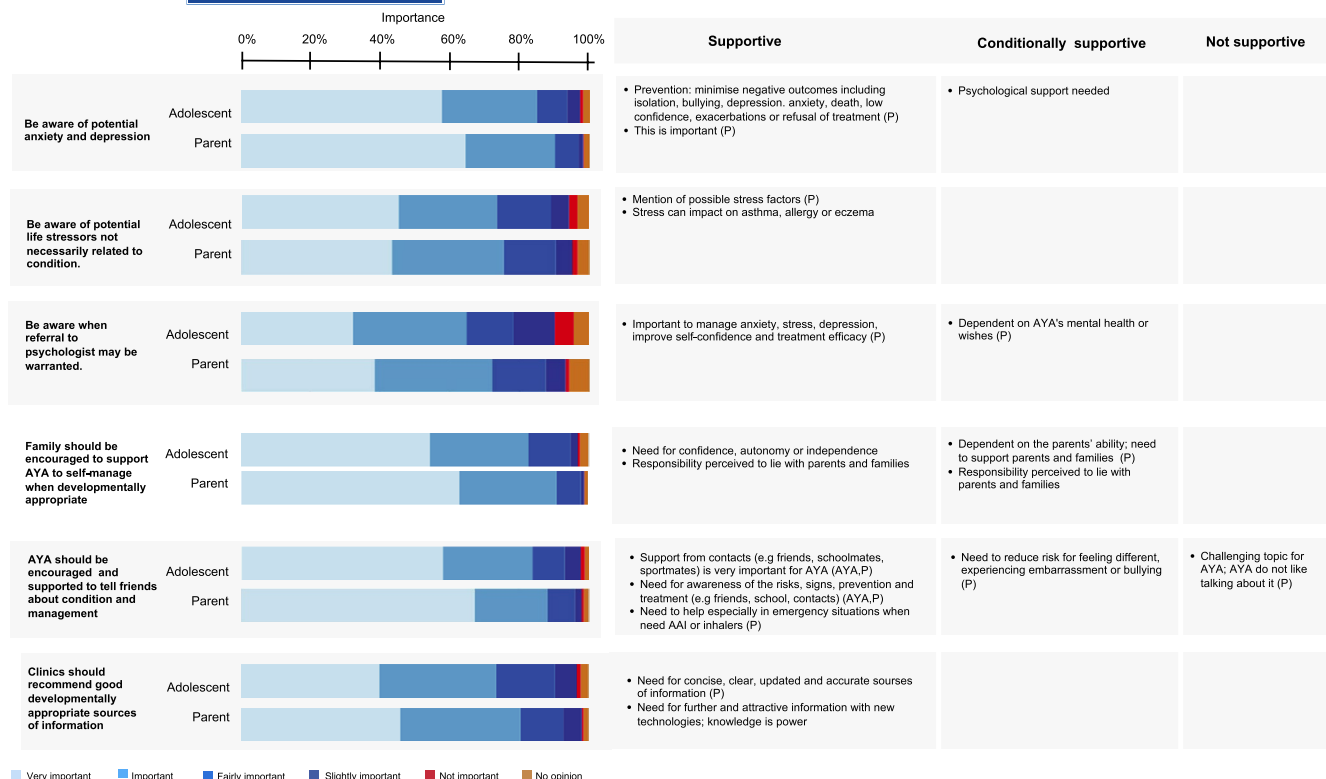


FIGURE 3 FIG Summary of feedback on psychology and support recommendations. AAI, adrenaline autoinjectors; AYA, adolescents and young adults; GP, general practitioner; P, parents; HCP, healthcare professionals. The thematic map includes themes where the total number of comments for each theme ≥ 11 . Information in brackets specifies which group (AYA and/or P) has more than 11 comments in each theme. If none of the groups reported ≥ 11 comments in the theme but it has ≥ 11 total number of comments this theme is also included

4.1 | Strengths and limitations of the survey

Although the survey covered most European countries, it may not represent the opinions of AYA and their parents in countries not surveyed. Technical limitations meant that comments were not included for the second recommendation; however, ranking did allow us to assess importance in both groups. The representativeness of the survey is likely to be high given the large number of responses from patients with a range of allergic conditions, and their parents. Furthermore, 29.7% had one and 22% more than four allergic comorbidities. To the best of our knowledge, this survey is the first of its kind to evaluate draft recommendations by patients and their parents through a pan-European survey design, and the high number of free-text comments analysed in this survey allowed for more in-depth understanding of the patient perspective on recommendations concerning transition and transfer of AYA with allergy and/or asthma from paediatric to adult services.

4.2 | Implications

There are several important implications arising from the findings of this survey. Firstly, recommendations on transitional care are important for AYA with allergy and/or asthma and therefore should be

implemented within clinical practice across Europe. Secondly, qualitative analysis of comments can help to refine recommendations by allowing for the provision of additional information from the patient perspective.

All generic and allergy-specific recommendations on adherence, self-management, support and psychological help received positive feedback from both AYA with allergies and/or asthma and their parents in Europe. Recommendations are intended to be useful, practical, facilitate local teams to work together and promote transition and transfer where necessary. We would like to emphasise that the application of these recommendations and the effectiveness of the healthcare for AYA with allergies and asthma should be reevaluated through regular audits.¹⁰ Assessment should involve AYA and families, as well as policy makers, researchers and government agencies.²⁶ It is hoped that harmonization of the transition process and practice will improve psychological and physical outcomes as well as the quality of life of these patients.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

This pan-European survey showed that adolescents and young adults with allergy and/or asthma and their parents find draft EAACI recommendations on transitional care for these conditions important or very important. Qualitative analysis of responses to open-ended

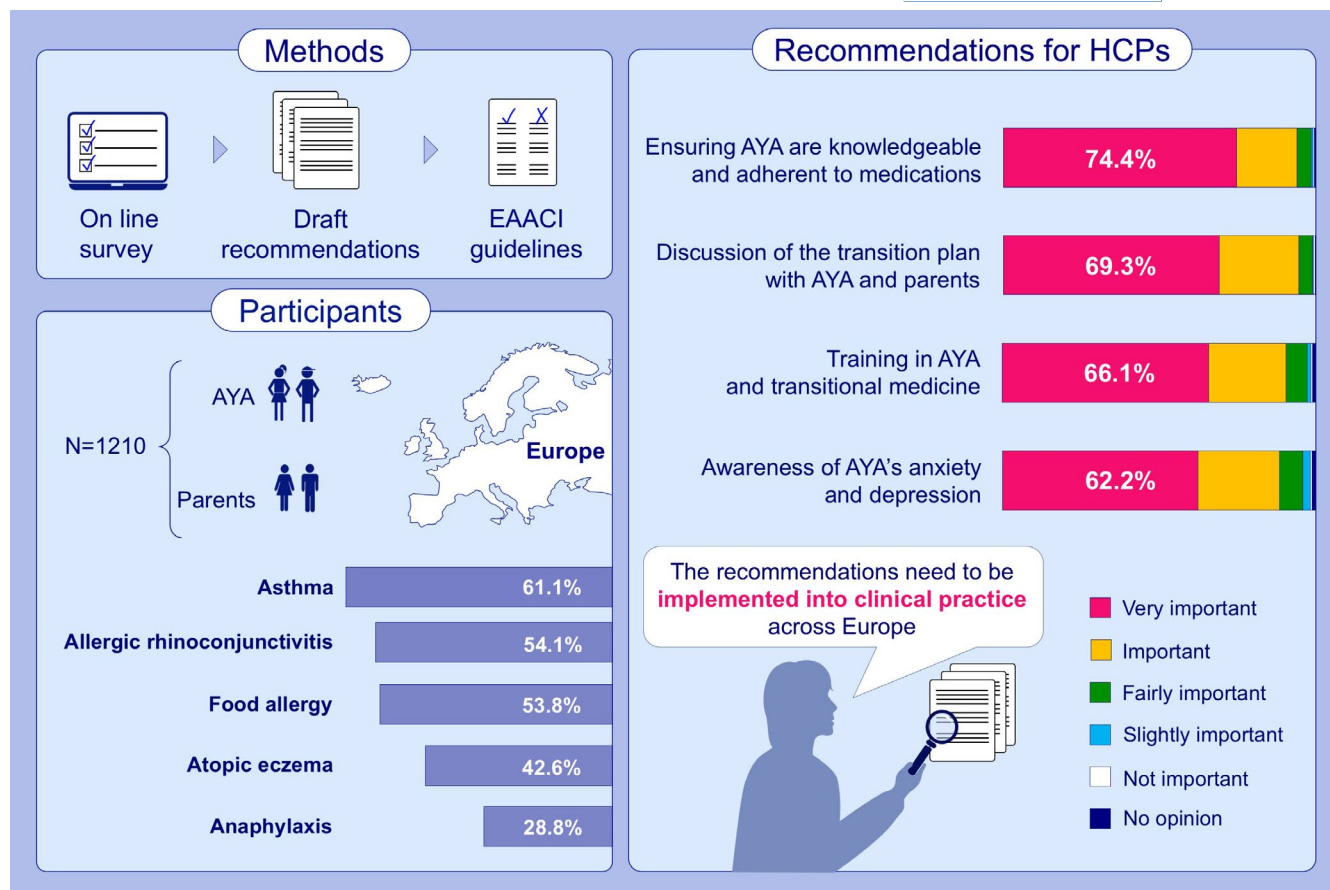


FIGURE 4 Summary of the feedback on draft recommendations of EAACI Guideline on the effective transition of adolescents and young adults with allergy and/or asthma. AYA, adolescents and young adults; HCP, healthcare professionals

questions confirmed the value of these recommendations and provided additional information from a patient perspective. Next steps should include implementation of recommendations into clinical practice taking into account differences between European countries in how transition may be organized.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

GR and RK report research funding from Asthma UK and National Institutes of Health Research into the challenge associated with asthma during adolescents. FT reports being a parent of a young adult with food allergy. None of the other authors have anything to disclose.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

GR, EK and M.V.-O involved in survey concept and design. EK and GR involved in statistical analysis and interpretation of data, and drafting of the original manuscript. EK, GR, CA, RCK, AG, PC, T.G-B and MHG involved in qualitative analysis. GR, M.V.-O., EA, KB, RCK, PC, CA, BD, CGM, AD, CG, VH, BJ, HP, AFS, T.G-B, SSG, MHG, FT and OF reviewed and edited the manuscript. All authors provided critical review of the manuscript and approved the final version. Obtained funding, GR, M.V.-O.

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