

THE USE OF BONE DENSITOMETRY IN ITALY

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In an Italian multicenter observational study (Osteoporosis Treatment in Clinical Practice, TOP Study) information was gathered regarding why patients were sent for BMD testing in the various regions and the results of their testing.

The group analysed was made up of postmenopausal women in post that reported to a densitometry center upon request of a specialist or general practitioner; the method included on-line compilation of a questionnaire requesting clinical data, reasons for testing, and results.

9585 forms were gathered from 75 centers distributed in 15 regions. 67% of the examination requests came from general practitioners, while the remaining 33% derived from various specialists. 50% were requests for DXA of the spine, 33% for DXA of the hip and in 25% of the tests an ultrasound method was utilized (heel or finger).

The average age of women who underwent densitometry resulted being 63±10 years in the north central areas and 61±10 years in the southern regions ($p < 0.05$ between the groups).

A diagnosis of osteoporosis resulted in 36% of the cases, osteopenia in 50% and normal bone mineral density in 25%.

The principal motivations for the test were: screening (43%), follow up (22%) and back or joint pain (16%).

There are important differences between regions regarding the number of patients that undergo the testing according to the established Regional Criteria for Essential Assistance Levels (LEA): >66% in Liguria, Veneto and Marche; 33-66% in Lombardia, Emilia and Toscana; <33% in Lazio, Abruzzo, Campania, Puglia and Sicilia. These differences are only in part justified by varying Regional regulations regarding testing.

For 2377 patients the examination was conducted as a follow up, within the 18th month for 60% of them. On the average, 52% of the patients did not have significant differences between the first and the second test, while 31% registered an improvement (38% if on any therapy, 50% if on alendronate).

This preliminary analysis of the data demonstrates a frequent inappropriate and not homogeneous use of densitometry in Italy and indicates the necessity for the diffusion of guidelines and a revision of the LEA criteria.