

The Role of Mobile Health Technologies in Stratifying Patients for AIT and Its Cessation: The ARIA-EAACI Perspective

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1 The role of mobile health technologies in stratifying patients for AIT and its 2 cessation. The ARIA-EAACI perspective

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126 Abstract

Allergen immunotherapy (AIT) is a proven therapeutic option for the treatment of allergic rhinitis 127 and/or asthma. Many international or national practice guidelines have been produced, but the 128 129 evidence-based method varies and they do not usually propose care pathways. The present paper 130 considers the possible role of mHealth in AIT for allergic rhinitis/asthma. There are no currently 131 available validated biologic biomarkers that can predict AIT success, and mHealth biomarkers have 132 some relevance. In the current paper, the following aspects will be discussed: patient stratification for 133 AIT, symptom medication scores for the follow-up of patients, clinical trials as well as the approach of 134 the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology.

135

- 136 **Key words:** mHealth, ARIA, EAACI, allergic rhinitis, immunotherapy
- 137

138 Abbreviations

- 139
- 140 AIT: Allergen immunotherapy
- 141 AR: Allergic rhinitis
- 142 CDSS: Clinical decision support system
- 143 CSMS: Combined symptom-medication score
- 144 EAACI: European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology
- 145 MASK: Mobile Airways Sentinel network
- 146 SMS: Symptom-medication score
- 147 RCT: Randomised controlled trial
- 148 RWD: Real world data
- 149 RWE: Real world evidence
- 150 VAS: Visual analogue scale

151 Introduction

152 Allergen immunotherapy (AIT) is a proven therapeutic option for the treatment of respiratory 153 allergies. Many guidelines or national practice parameters or care pathways for AIT have been 154 proposed (1-3). The decision to prescribe AIT for the patient should be individualized and based on 155 the relevance of the allergens, the persistence of symptoms despite use of appropriate medications 156 prescribed according to guidelines, as well as on the availability of good-guality and efficacious 157 extracts (4). AIT should be reserved for patients with moderate/severe rhinitis or mild to moderate 158 asthma who, despite appropriate pharmacotherapy and adherence, continue to exhibit exacerbations 159 that appear to be related to allergen exposure, except in some specific cases (5, 6).

160 The digital transformation of health and healthcare (including mHealth and artificial intelligence) 161 places the patient at the centre of the health system and is revolutionizing the practice of medicine (7, 162 8). Biomarkers associated with mHealth and clinical decision support systems (CDSS) (9) may change 163 the scope of AIT as they will help monitor a patient's disease control (10, 11) to enable: (i) patient 164 stratification; (ii) clinical trials and real-world evidence; (iii) monitoring the efficacy and safety of 165 targeted therapies (a critical process for identifying appropriate reimbursement); and (iv) 166 implementation of stopping rules (Figure 1). Clinical stopping rules should be developed for AIT -167 similarly to those currently considered for biologics in severe asthma - as a guidance for the 168 continuation or cessation of treatment after a short (early stopping rule) or long (late stopping rule) 169 period. As an example, a global treatment evaluation after 16 weeks is used as an early stopping rule 170 for omalizumab treatment (12, 13).

There are however two pre-requisites before any mHealth tool should be used. The tool should comply
with privacy regulations and should be validated. To date, very few tools are available for rhinitis (14).
Evidence-based development was found for four apps: MASK-air (24 papers reviewed in (15-19)),
AllergyMonitor (20, 21), Pollen (Polleninfo.org) (22) and Air Rater (23).

175 Concept of patient stratification for AIT

176 The stratification of patients into subpopulations is the basis of clinical decision-making for 177 increased diagnostic and treatment efficacy (24, 25). Patient stratification also integrates costs and 178 social determinant risk models to propose the right care management for the individual patient (26).

179 In diseases with a very high prevalence, such as allergic diseases, patient stratification is required to: 180 (i) identify the best candidates for intervention through complex care management; (ii) reduce the 181 amount of time and resources needed to match the right patient to a care management programme; and 182 (iii) optimize costs as some therapeutic interventions cannot be administered to all patients. Patient 183 stratification may also help to improve the patient's engagement (27).

- 184 There are currently no genetic or blood biomarkers validated for predicting or monitoring the efficacy
- 185 of AIT at an individual patient level, although several candidates have been investigated (28). mHealth
- 186 biomarkers are likely to represent the future, before genetic or blood biomarkers are available.

187 Symptom-medication scores using mHealth

Symptom-medication scores (SMSs) are needed to investigate the efficacy of AIT, particularly in clinical practice or for randomized controlled trials (RCTs) (29, 30) and observational studies. The European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) proposed a combined symptom and medication score (CSMS) for allergen immunotherapy (AIT) trials (31). However, it had not been fully evaluated until recently.

193 A study using MASK (Mobile Airways Sentinel NetworK) (32, 33) (Table 1) attempted to validate 194 CSMS using work productivity as a surrogate marker in over 6,800 users. There was a highly 195 significant correlation between the visual analogue scales (VASs) "allergy" and "work" (r=0.73, 196 p<0.0001). The CSMS showed a lower correlation with VAS work (r=0.56, P<0.0001). This can be 197 explained by many reasons, but one appears to be relevant: adding the same coefficient to all values of 198 a symptom score or to a VAS level may not be optimal.

199 Since the CSMS was not highly correlated with VAS work, a new score was based on (i) the results 200 obtained in MASK (32, 33), and (ii) the algorithm for AR treatment developed by the MACVIA 201 expert group (34) revised by the MASK expert group after a modified Delphi exercise (9). Real-world 202 data from MASK (32, 35) showed that (i) medications are likely to have a different effectiveness 203 depending on rhinitis control level: higher impact for a lower VAS level and lower impact for a higher 204 VAS level and (ii) co-medication should be considered. A new CSMS was therefore constructed and a 205 higher correlation was found (r=0.82) (Bousquet, in preparation). However, this score needs to be 206 refined and should be regularly updated using new data and machine learning.

- When available, this CSMS will be combined with the pollen and air pollution data of the geolocalized
 patient, making it possible to correlate daily allergen and pollution exposure to CSMS (36) (ARIAEAACI-CMS).
- 210 The ARIA-EAACI-CSMS can be used to stratify patients for AIT and to follow the patient during AIT
- 211 (and beyond when AIT is stopped) in RCTs and real-life observational studies.
- 212

213 mHealth for patient stratification and follow up in AIT

In MAKS-air, we have devised a very simple tool for shared-decision making that shows the symptom control, medications and adherence to treatment on the screen of the physician (37). Moreover, we have developed an electronic clinical decision support system that can be used for this purpose. It is currently in English only and should be translated soon (38). Finally, we plan to use machine learning to help the physician to refine the stratification.

219 Indication of AIT

AIT is not required for all allergic patients. As proposed in the ARIA care pathways for AIT¹, it should be indicated in patients with poor control of the disease (Table 2) and in some patients controlled by pharmacotherapy who may develop asthma exacerbations (such as pollen-induced asthma or thunderstorm-induced asthma) (39, 40).

A stratification is therefore needed to propose a patient-centred approach using several steps for personalized medicine. These include an optimal allergy diagnosis, the assessment of adherence to medications as well as the demonstration of uncontrolled disease associated with allergen exposure despite optimal medications.

It is very important to stratify the patient as rapidly as possible, and mHealth has a relevant importance. Using the ARIA-EAACI-CSMS, the physician can, after the first pollen season, daily assess the adherence to treatment, the level of pharmacotherapy, the control of AR and asthma as well as the impact on work or school. Only stratified patients who require AIT will be selected. This should improve the efficacy of AIT and may have a relevant impact on health economics and reimbursement strategies.

234 Follow-up and early stopping rule

AIT is a long-term treatment. It is important to identify patients who are not well controlled and who should stop AIT from those who are benefitting from the treatment. Using the ARIA-EAACI-CSMS, the physician will recognize the exact symptoms and medications during pollen exposure by comparison to the previous year for each individual patient. This will allow an improved shared decision making (SDM) with the patient in order to determine whether to continue or stop AIT. It is likely that the patient will be prone to continuing AIT, thereby improving adherence to the treatment.

241 Follow-up and late stopping rule

- 242 AIT is proposed for a duration of 3 years and it is stopped without objective assessment of its efficacy.
- 243 A late stopping rule is therefore needed to help physicians to stop or continue AIT. The same approach
- 244 will be used for each year of AIT, and the physician will be able to assess the benefits of the treatment,
- 245 thereby potentially improving SDM. After 3 years, the physician may be in a better position to 246
- propose the continuation or cessation of AIT.

247 Follow-up after AIT is stopped

248 Using the same ARIA-EAACI-CSMS, the patient will be followed after AIT is stopped, and the 249 physician will know whether AIT should eventually be re-initiated. Once again, SDM and the link 250 between the different health professionals will potentially be improved.

251

Stratification in house dust mite allergy

252 In allergic diseases for house dust mites, the seasonality is not clear and symptoms cannot be 253 associated to allergen exposure. However, the stratification of patients is required as the indication of 254 acarizax[®] (house dust mite sublingual immunotherapy) in Europe proposes AIT in "persistent 255 moderate to severe house dust mite allergic rhinitis despite use of symptom-relieving medication" 256 (https://mri.cts-mrp.eu/Human/Downloads/DE_H_1947_001_FinalPI.pdf) (6). The early and late 257 stopping rules using objective data are also of great importance.

The global allergy solution: mHealth transformation of care 258

259 The delivery of cost-effective modern health care is challenging for the management of chronic 260 diseases - and in particular for allergic diseases (41) - as management, which is often dependent on 261 specialist and supporting services, is becoming unaffordable. Accordingly, innovative solutions, often 262 based on mobile health, are required(42, 43). Authorities should be supported for the transformation of 263 health and care towards integrated care with organizational health literacy for allergic diseases (16, 44, 264 45). A Global Allergy Simple Solution should provide the framework to digitally transform the 265 prevention and control of allergic diseases in a cost-effective manner (46). Mobile health could be 266 used to achieve optimal guaranty for an accessible and affordable treatment in stratified and 267 participatory patients with allergic diseases and to provide change management (8).

268 **Clinical trials**

269 The problems

270 Major problems of the double blind, placebo controlled (DBPC) RCTs of AIT include the relatively 271 low mean symptom intensity in the active treatment group since many days of the survey may be

- without allergen exposure and the small active vs. placebo difference. Although there are manypossible causes, some appear to have more weight than others:
- Patients receiving AIT are scattered over a large area that may not be covered by clinically relevant
 pollen counts of the area.
- In a given area, the level of exposure to airborne allergen varies from one day to the next during thepollen season.
- The duration of the pollen season is approximated for a given area and does not take account of
 variations in allergen exposure, although attempts have been made to resolve this problem (47, 48).
- Patients often move between sites (work and home, for example), and the level of allergen
 exposure varies from one site to the next. However, technical issues prevent this important issue
 from being considered in DBPC RCTs.
- The assessment of environmental exposure requires more than pollen counts. Weather parameters
 and pollutants can modulate allergen exposure.
- Pollen counts do not completely reflect symptoms during the whole season (49, 50).
- Personal exposure data are needed, but individual pollen samplers cannot be used daily in largescale trials, and these methods have not been validated.
- Next-generation real-time pollen monitoring (51) cannot be used throughout Europe and does not
 account for individual exposure.
- 290 Potential mHealth solutions
- 291 The evaluation of the allergic risk requires:
- Assessment of allergen exposure in individual patients;
- Evaluation of pollen counts across Europe, using a standardized method;
- The embedding pollution and climate data (52);
- The evaluation of symptoms in the local area (15).

As part of the POLLAR project, the Finnish Meteorological Institute is using artificial intelligence

techniques to finalize a predictive model of daily pollen exposure by using climatologic data and air

- 298 pollution. The model will be refined at the end of 2020 and embedded in MASK-Air.
- 299 Embedding pollen exposure data and patients' symptom severity in an app
- 300 As an example, the MASK-air app (including daily geolocation) in line with the European Union's
- **301** General Data Protection Regulation (53-55) can feature:

- 302 1. A model of pollen, pollution and symptoms, with a grid of around 10 x 10 km across Europe303 (already embedded in the app).
- 304 2. The daily symptoms and medications (over-the-counter and prescription medications customized305 for each individual country) that will be scored and used to construct the ARIA-EAACI-CSMS.
- **306** Other tools with the desired features can also be used.

307 Assessing the placebo effect using mHealth

The placebo effect commonly occurs in clinical trials. The psychological and physiological factors
associated with patients' expectations about a treatment's positive and negative effects have yet to be
well characterized. mHealth may provide some help in reducing the placebo effect (Table 3). (56)

311 Real-world data (RWD) in observational studies

312 Real-world evidence (derived from observational studies) combines the results of DBPC RCTs and

313 RWD. This provides clinically relevant information that usefully complements DBPC RCTs (33, 57-

314 59). The real-life approach can be extended to a variety of allergens and AIT methods.

315 Since all patients use the same app and system, the application of machine learning is likely to 316 enhance the efficacy of AIT at the individual level. It may also automatically provide advice to the 317 physician (e.g. on early stopping) in clinical practice.

Evaluating the role of mHealth technologies in AIT – the EAACI Task force

319 As millions of patients suffering from allergic diseases may benefit from mHealth innovations, the 320 EAACI created a Task Force to assess the state of the art as well as the future potential of (Information 321 and communication technology) ICT in the field of allergy. The evaluation of 136 mobile apps in 2016 322 depicted a broad heterogeneity in terms of content and quality. As the mobile health environment is a 323 very dynamic field, some of these may no longer exist or comply with regulatory requirements. Very 324 few apps had been clinically validated and many were not based on guidelines or clinical evidence 325 (14). The Task Force assessed the design, user engagement, content, potential of inducing behavioural 326 change, credibility/accountability, and privacy policies of mHealth products. The perspectives of 327 healthcare professionals and allergic patients were provided. This underlined the need of thorough 328 investigation for an effective design of mHealth technologies as auxiliary tools to improve quality of 329 care. mHealth technology, including telemonitoring, integrated care pathways (ICPs), and CDSS are 330 suggested as potential tools to aid decision-making for AIT, improve adherence, monitor efficacy and 331 safety as well as identify clinical responders to treatment. This approach was acknowledged as a 332 facilitator for the change in AIT perspective from clinician- to patient-centred care.

333 EAACI Research and Outreach Committee

The newly formed EAACI Research and Outreach Committee (EAACI ROC) aims to (i) provide new forms of translation of key research findings, (ii) better meet the needs of clinicians and (ii) more rapidly develop precision approaches that will facilitate the development of EAACI Guidelines to improve and cure allergic disease and asthma. Telemedicine and e-Health, novel clinical trial designs and a special focus on high-quality real-world evidence are amongst the top priorities of the EAACI 2021-2022 Research Agenda (60).

340 Conclusion

- 341
- 342 mHealth has the potential to change the management of allergic diseases using validated tools in order
- to better stratify patients. (8) However, these tools may be non-beneficial if improperly used or if they
- have not been fully validated.

345 Table 1: Features of MASK (Mobile Airways Sentinel Network)

346 MASK has been recognized as an example of good practice in the field of digitally-enabled, integrated, ٠ 347 person-centred care by the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (16). It 348 includes a smartphone application (MASK-air) tested in 27 countries and 17 languages by 40,000 users 349 (technology readiness level, TRL 9) (15) and the POLLAR project (interaction between air pollution, asthma 350 and rhinitis) funded by the European Institute of Innovation & Technology to monitor the patient's day-to-351 day allergen and pollution exposure (52). MASK is fully GDPR compliant (61). 352 In MASK, geolocalized users self-assessed their daily symptom control using the touchscreen functionality 353 on their smart phone to click on VAS scores (ranging from 0 to 100) for overall symptoms (global), nose, 354 eyes, asthma and work asked in this order with several other screens in between. 355 Users input their daily medications using a scroll list which contains all country-specific OTC and prescribed ٠ 356 medications available for each country. 357 The MASK-air results have changed the concept of allergy phenotypes (62) and the management of 358 allergic diseases (8, 57). 359 MASK is freely available in 27 countries and 18 languages for patients or research purposes. 360 361

362

363 Table 2: Global applicability of MASK (from (15) (61))

Applicability	MASK			
Clinical practice	 Physicians will be able to read the files of the patients in order to: Optimize treatment for the patient and, in particular, the current or the next pollen season. Assess and increase the adherence to treatment. Better stratify the patient Help for shared decision making Prescribe allergen immunotherapy (AIT) more rapidly when the patient is not controlled despite optimal pharmacologic treatment. Determine the efficacy of AIT in patients Essential tool to provide personalized medicine in AR and asthma 			
Change management	 In the future , clinical decision support system and machine learning will be used Many patients are uncontrolled and non -adherent to treatment. Moreover, patients use their medications as needed and not as a regular basis as prescribed These features are found in all countries Change management is needed for value added medicine 			
Patient empowerment	 Better understanding of the symptoms Sentinel network linking aerobiology data and control Improved adherence Self-management Patient empowerment Messages sent by the App. 			
Clinical trials	 For RCTs, it is essential to have clarity on definitions, and relevant tools. To better stratify the patients needing AIT To assess the efficacy of AIT during the trial To assess the efficacy when AIT is stopped Observational studies are of key importance to confirm RCTs and bring new hypotheses for the treatment of AR and asthma 			
Registration and reimbursement of medicines	 Controlled trials designed with a uniform approach will be more easily evaluated by the Health Technology Assessment agencies for reimbursement. The Allergy Diary uses EQ-5D, a validated measure of utility Better understanding of direct and indirect costs Controlled trials designed with a uniform approach will help to synchronize data from real-life world regarding clinical effects and safety/tolerability of new drugs (post-marketing pharmacovigilance 			

364

Table 3: Precision Medicine in the indication of AIT in allergy to inhalants (1)

366 367	1.	Precise diagnosis with disease history, skin prick tests and/or specific IgE and, if needed, component- resolved <i>in vitro</i> diagnosis (CRD) (63). In some rare instances, provocation tests may be needed.			
368	2.	Proven indications: Allergic rhinitis, conjunctivitis and/or asthma.			
369	3.	Allergic symptoms predominantly induced by the relevant allergen exposure.			
370 371 372 373	4.	Patient stratification: Poor control of symptoms despite appropriate pharmacotherapy according to guidelines with adherence to treatment during the allergy season and/or the alteration of the natural history of allergy (64). Mobile technology may become of relevant importance in the stratification of patients (mHealth biomarker).			
374	5.	Demonstration of efficacy and safety for the product with relevant trials.			
375	6.	The patient (and caregiver)'s views represent an essential component for shared decision making.			
376					
377					
378					

379 Table 4: Digital health and machine learning to assess the placebo effect in pollen DBPC RCTs (56)

Problem		Solution	Strengths	Weaknesses
Allergen exposure varies from one patient location to another	Daily environment assessment	App with daily geolocation	The patient will be assessed with ONE geolocation per day (1 for privacy reasons)	If the patient moves during the day, one geolocation will be insufficient
Allergen exposure needs to be assessed daily		Model of the pollen season embedded in the app with a resolution of 10 x 10 km (usually)	Precise determination of the pollen exposure	10 x 10 km may be insufficient for some patients
Pollution is a confounding factor for allergy		Inclusion of pollution data in the model	More than simply pollen exposure	To be tested
Symptoms may not be correlated with pollen exposure	Арр	Inclusion of symptoms in the area in the model with machine learning	Symptoms of the area will inform of the overall allergic risk	To be tested
Symptom- medication score	Novel symptom- medication score	Symptoms and all medications of the different European countries	Validated for pharmacotherapy (32, 35)	Low adherence

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