Adherence to published guidelines on TB screening before the start of treatment with biologics in Germany

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Introduction
To examine how strictly the screening recommendations for latent tuberculosis (TB) are observed in Germany by rheumatologists treating RA patients with biologics.

Summary:
Even in specialised rheumatologic care there is variation in screening procedures as well as in consequences taken. Deviation is larger in units with only a few patients under biologic therapy.

Conclusion:
TB screening recommendations should be harmonized and their distribution should be intensified.

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Method
- The German biologics register RABBIT has been implemented in 2001 and follows up RA patients with a new start of any of the licensed cytokine inhibitors.
- We surveyed 162 rheumatological practices and outpatient clinics participating in the German biologics register RABBIT.
- We investigated practice variation in TB screening methods in German rheumatology.

Recommendations of the Paul-Ehrlich-Institut (PEI) for the screening for latent TB before the start of biologics (Feb. 2002)
- Intradermal TB test (Mendel-Mantoux) with 10 TE
- Induration of ≥ 5 mm = positive
- Latent TB must be presumed, if:
  - Skin test result (1st or 2nd) with 10 TE is positive
  - Negative skin-test but suspect findings in the chest X-ray
  - Skin-test and chest x-ray show negative results, but possible contact to potentially infectious persons

When do you prescribe prophylactic treatment for TB?
- Always if skin test is positive 58%
- Always if chest x-ray shows suspect findings 32%
- Only when both tests (x-ray & skin test) are positive 15%
- No prophylactic treatment (in some units: no start of biologics) 6%

Which prophylactic treatment do you usually use?
- Isoniazid 94%
- Rifampicin 6%

When did you start screening for TB?
(9% of units)

- Always if skin test is positive 58%
- Always if chest x-ray shows suspect findings 32%
- Only when both tests (x-ray & skin test) are positive 15%
- No prophylactic treatment (in some units: no start of biologics) 6%

Which prophylactic treatment do you usually use?
- Isoniazid 94%
- Rifampicin 6%

After initiation of prophylactic treatment: how long do you wait until you start a biologic therapy? (% of units)