

INTRODUCTION

Maltese healthcare professionals use the British National Formulary (BNF) as the main formulary. The BNF is therefore used as source of reference for medicinal products and any related information. However, a number of products which are available on the Maltese market are not listed in the BNF resulting in lack of information on such products. The Maltese Medicines Handbook (MMH) is therefore designed to include these medicinal products.

AIMS

The aim of this study was to update the formulary to its fourth version. An online version was also launched and this was an innovation when compared to previous similar studies. The use of both the handbook version and the online version was assessed amongst Maltese healthcare professionals especially pharmacists and doctors.

METHOD

1. The products available in Malta but not listed in the BNF were identified by comparing a list of medicinal products published annually by the Malta Medicines Authority with the products available in the BNF. The list published by the Malta Medicines Authority contains all products which are authorised on the Maltese market.
2. Information concerning preparations to be included in the formulary was obtained from the Summary of Product Characteristics of the drugs and the 38th edition of the 'Martindale, a complete drug reference'.
3. The exact same data included in the handbook version of the formulary was also placed online.
4. The final version of the Maltese Medicines Handbook was published and distributed to healthcare professionals. An online version of the formulary was also launched.
5. The evaluation of the final version of the formulary and its online counterpart was conducted through questionnaires distributed to 30 healthcare professionals from randomly selected pharmacies.

For each medicinal product included in the MMH with an active ingredient listed in the BNF, the information presented in the formulary is shown in Table 1. Those which were not available on the local market at the time of printing but are still licensed in Malta, were included without a price in the MMH.

Table 1: Information presented

Active Ingredient	Marketing Authorisation holder	POM/OTC status	Dosage form
Trade Name	Consumer Price for products available in Malta*	Distributor in Malta	Dose

Meanwhile, for products with an active ingredient not listed in the BNF, the information presented in both table 2 and table 1 was included in the MMH.

Table 2: Additional information presented

Dose of Drug	Drug Information	Contra-indications	Advice on the use of drug in renal and hepatic impairment	Information on use during pregnancy and breast feeding
Cautions	Indications	Side-effects		

RESULTS

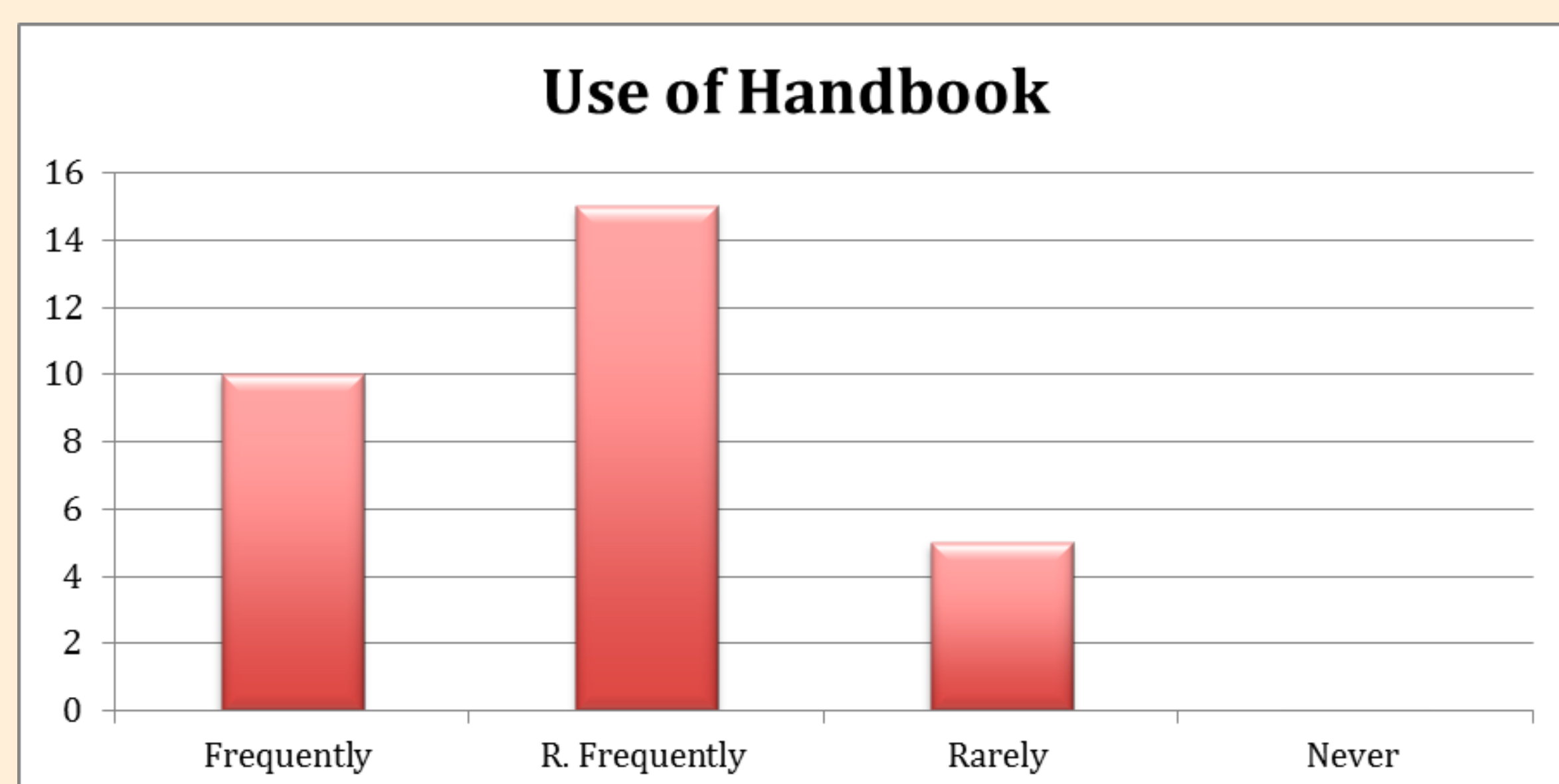
The Medicines Authority list used had **4438 drug entries**

From these, **629 products** had trade name, active ingredient or both not available in the BNF

550 products had only their active ingredient listed

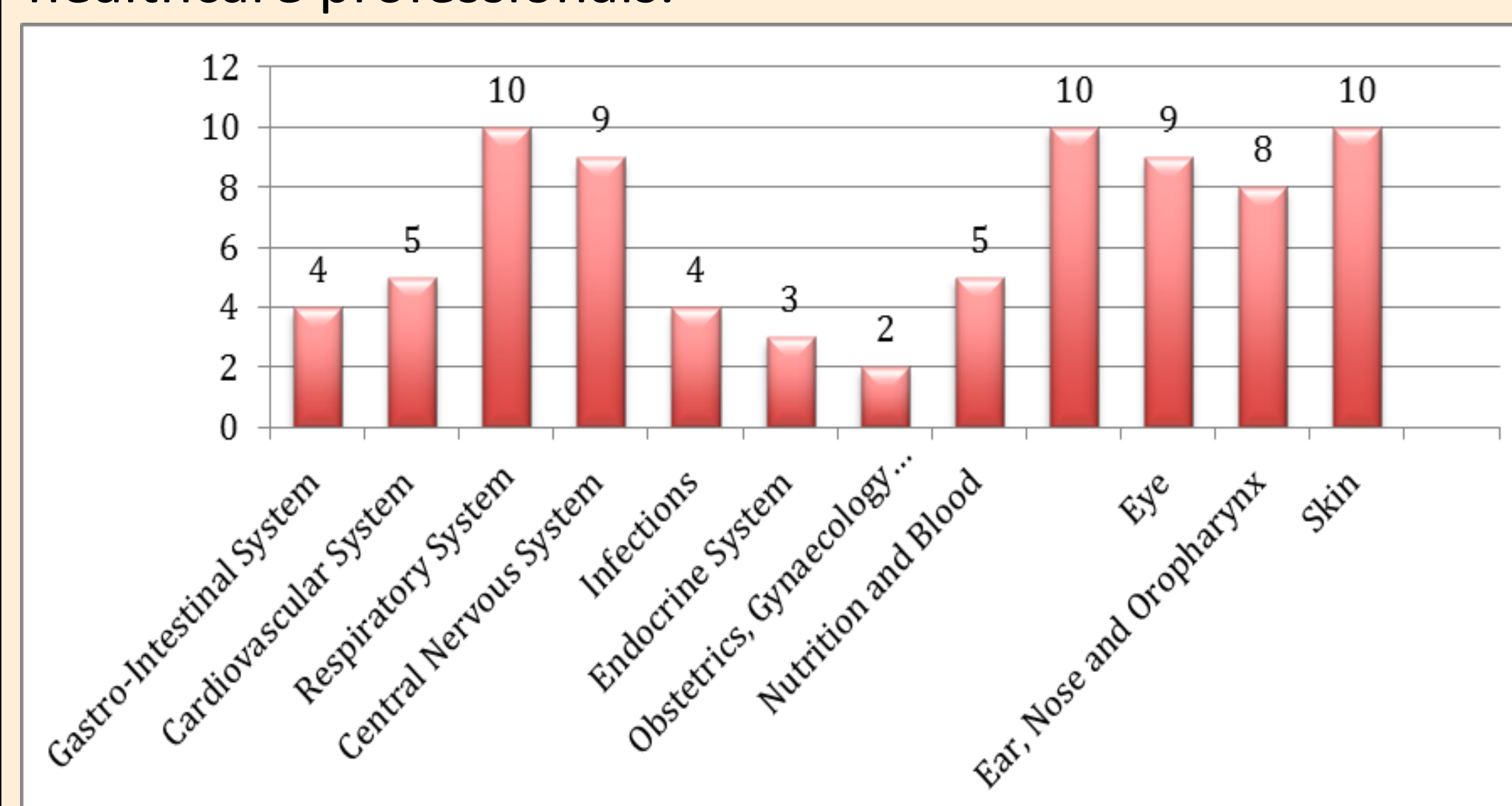
79 products had neither their active ingredient nor the trade name in the BNF

All the participants (N=30) found the formulary useful and the majority (n=15) stated that they use it frequently. No participant stated that it was never used. This is shown in Graph 1.



Graph 1: Use of the handbook by healthcare professionals (N=30)

Graph 2 shows the number of 'new' active ingredients, according to chapter, included in the MMH. They are 'new' because they are not found in the BNF and therefore no information on them is available to Maltese healthcare professionals.



Graph 2: Number of active ingredients, according to chapter, not in the BNF

The presentation of both the handbook and the online version was highly acclaimed by all healthcare professionals with all aspects of the presentation given a high score.

Participants believe that the formulary is up-to-date and of great service to local healthcare professionals. All participants stated that the online version of the formulary is a good innovation, although the majority (n=22) prefer using the handbook version.

CONCLUSION

Two important suggestions to be considered for future similar studies are that the information regarding 'Cautionary and Advisory Labels' should be added and that the time of updating of the handbook is decreased from 3 years to 2 years or less. The online version of the formulary can be accessed on www.maltesemedicineshandbook.com