

INTRODUCTION

Most Maltese healthcare professionals rely on the British National Formulary (BNF) as their main reference source. However, a number of preparations marketed in Malta are not listed in the BNF. The Maltese Medicines Handbook (MMH) is a formulary designed to include medicinal products available in Malta which are not listed in the BNF. It is intended to be used by healthcare professionals as an addendum to the BNF. The first edition of the MMH was issued in 2006, while the second edition was issued in 2009^{1,2}.

AIMS

To update the MMH to its third edition and evaluate its use amongst Maltese healthcare professionals.

METHOD

A list of medicinal products having a marketing authorisation in Malta was downloaded from the Maltese Medicines Authority website. The trade name for each of the 3803 entries in this list was compared to BNF 61 published in March 2011. A total of 1334 preparations not listed in the BNF were identified and recorded in a database.

Visits to community pharmacies were conducted between September 2011 and February 2012 to identify which of these non-BNF cited preparations are actually marketed in Maltese community pharmacies.

Permission was requested from the BNF co-publishers to utilise the BNF format and classification.

Data concerning preparations to be included in the formulary was compiled from the Summary of Product Characteristics of respective products. When pharmacological drug information and mode of action of the drug were absent from the BNF, the thirty-sixth edition of the 'Martindale: the complete drug reference' was used as a reference source. Data relating to medical devices available in Malta was obtained from community pharmacies and local distributors.

Once the MMH was updated and a third edition compiled, questionnaires were distributed to 30 pharmacists and 15 medical doctors for the evaluation of the formulary. After 2 months, the questionnaires were recollected and data gathered from the questionnaires was analysed using Microsoft Excel 2007.

RESULTS

Information included for all medicinal products is shown in table 1, while information included for active ingredients not listed in the BNF is shown in table 2. For each medical device, its name, price and local distributor were included.

Figure 1 gives a diagrammatic representation of the number of entries per chapter. Compared to the previous edition, 174 items were removed, 109 new entries were added and 312 entries were updated.

A new section entitled 'cold and flu preparations' was added. This section contains 17 entries. The format for the section relating to cough preparations was also updated and a total of 34 preparations were presented in this section. From these, 19 (n=34) preparations have active ingredients not listed in the BNF.

All (n=45) participants found the third edition of the MMH useful and most participants (29) stated that they used it rather frequently. Participants showed a positive response towards the presentation of the handbook since no respondent gave a fair or poor score. Most participants (24) strongly agreed that the new section on 'cold and flu preparations' is informative and well organised. Thirty-six (n=45) participants strongly agreed that the handbook is user friendly and easy to follow. However 4 (n=45) participants stated that the information presented on medical devices was not enough.

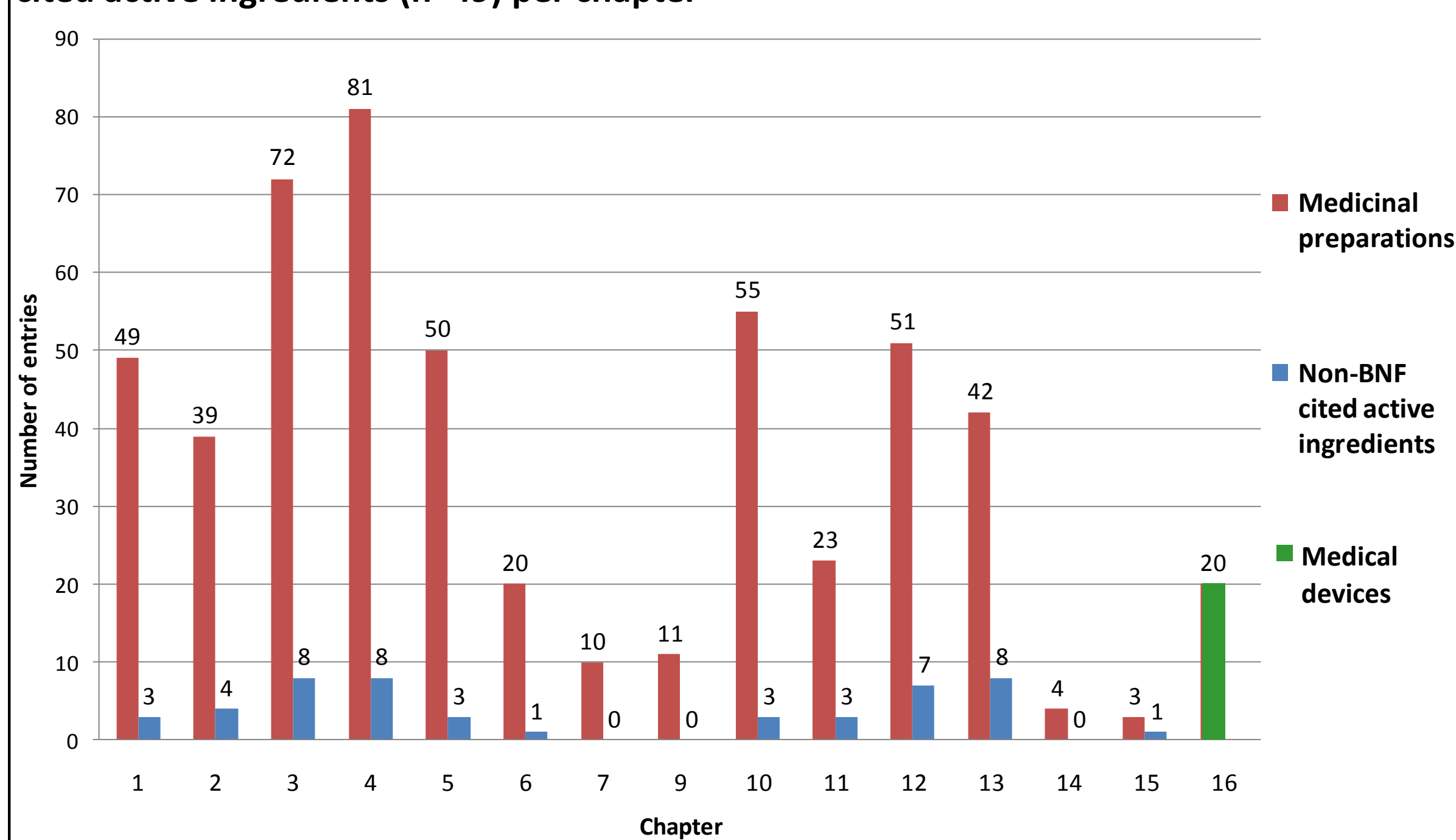
Table 1. Information included for all medicinal products

Trade name	Consumer price	PoM/OTC status	Dosage form
Active ingredient and amount	Marketing authorisation holder	Distributor in Malta	Dose

Table 2. Additional information included for medicinal preparations with an active ingredient not listed in the BNF

Indications	Contra-indications	Advice on the use of drug in:- Renal impairment	Information on the use during:- Pregnancy
Cautions	Side-effects		
Dose	Drug Information		

Figure 1. Number of medicinal preparations (n=510), medical devices (n=20) and non-BNF cited active ingredients (n=49) per chapter*



Chapters' Legend

1 Gastro-intestinal system	10 Musculoskeletal and joint disease
2 Cardiovascular system	11 Eye
3 Respiratory system	12 Ear, nose, and oropharynx
4 Central nervous system	13 Skin
5 Infections	14 Immunological products and vaccines
6 Endocrine system	15 Anaesthesia
7 Obstetrics, gynaecology and urinary disorders	16 Medical devices
9 Nutrition and blood	

* Chapter 8 is not included since items are not available from community pharmacies

CONCLUSION

A significant number of medicinal products marketed locally (510) are not listed in the BNF. This stresses the need of using additional formularies in conjunction with the BNF. The MMH suits this purpose best since it is designed to facilitate combined use with the BNF.

Healthcare professionals evaluated the MMH to be useful, easy to follow and up to date. The formulary reached its aim in informing healthcare professionals on non-BNF cited items. However, the significant changes undertaken while updating the MMH suggest that periodical updates are necessary to sustain the importance of the formulary. Indeed, the formulary should be updated more frequently than once every 3 years and a 2 year interval is being suggested.

References ¹ Micallef S. Compiling a formulary for non-BNF cited items. Msida (Malta). Department of Pharmacy, University of Malta; 2006.

² Cassar D. Formulary for non-BNF cited items. Msida (Malta). Department of Pharmacy, University of Malta; 2009.