



# Faecal occult blood testing in community pharmacy

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## Introduction

Faecal occult blood (FOB) tests for point-of-care testing (POCT) detect minute traces of blood in the faeces and are used in colorectal cancer (CRC) screening<sup>1</sup>. In Malta there is an average of 180 cases per year of CRC and it is the second cause of cancer mortality after breast cancer in females and the third cause of mortality after prostate and lung cancers in males<sup>2</sup>. The aims of this study were: 1) to assess the availability of FOB test kits for POCT and 2) to evaluate the test's applicability to the community pharmacy setting.

## Methodology

Availability of FOB test home kits was undertaken by contacting importers and 3 test kits were identified, as shown in Table 1.

Name of kit	Technology	Price per test
Fecal Occult Blood Plus®	Immuno-chemical	€ 3.45
Clearview FOB®	Immuno-chemical	€ 0.90
hemo FEC®	Guaiac-peroxidase	€ 1.03

Table 1: Details of kits chosen for the study

Applicability of FOB testing was evaluated by recruiting 70 participants (all over the age of 45 years) using convenience sampling from 9 community pharmacies, where each pharmacy was identified randomly from 9 regions of Malta.

Recruitment was done through pharmacist intervention and participants were referred to the investigator who gave information about the test, which was free of charge. Each participant was given an instructions' sheet, one of the test kits to perform the test at home and a self-administered questionnaire that assessed their knowledge and perception on FOB testing.

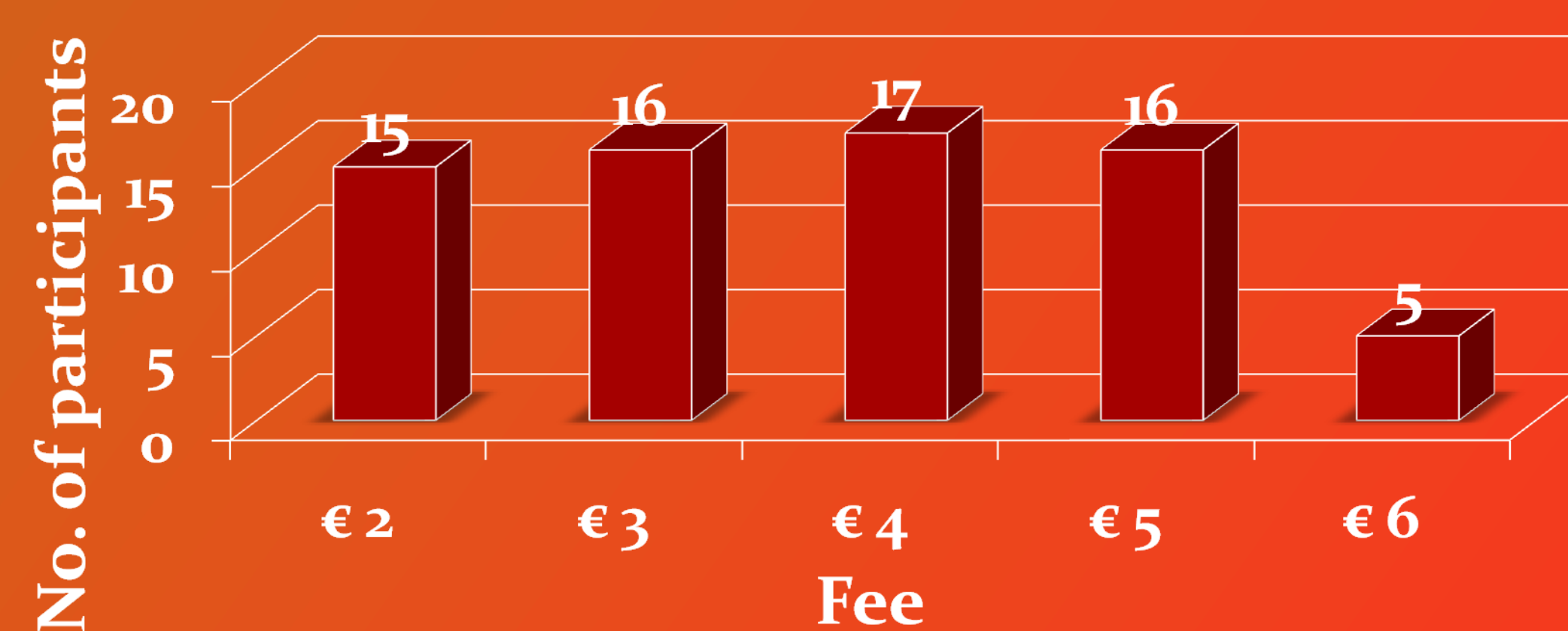
Another questionnaire, which assessed similar parameters, was administered to the managing pharmacist practising in each pharmacy (n=9). Ethics approval was granted from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) of the University of Malta.

## Results

The immunochemical FOB tests were found to be more user-friendly with 24 participants rating performance as 'very easy', while for the other kit, which used guaiac-peroxidase technology, same rating was given only by 4 participants.

Eight pharmacists were ready to offer this test if there is a minimum service fee of €2 over the cost of kit (see Table 1). Taking into account the cheapest user-friendly kit (€0.90; an immunochemical test) and adding the service fee (€2) requested by pharmacists one can reason that the total cost of the service would be in the bracket of €4. The majority (n=49) of participants were ready to pay between €3 to €5 per test (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Fee of service participants are ready to pay (n=70)



## Discussion

Results show that it would be feasible to introduce this test as a new point-of-care service in Maltese community pharmacies. This is because FOB test kits for POCT, that are very easy to use by patients, are available at reasonable costs. Moreover, the majority of participants are in favour of this test being available in the pharmacy, and the majority of pharmacists are positive towards providing this service. Such a service would increase awareness and access to CRC screening amongst the Maltese public.

### References

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