Diagnostics of autoimmune bullous diseases in German dermatology departments.

Abstract:
No consistent data are available on the currently employed diagnostic tools for autoimmune bullous diseases in Germany. The aim of this survey was to describe currently performed diagnostic methods for bullous autoimmune diseases in German dermatology departments. A standardized questionnaire evaluated the available diagnostic methods i.e. direct immunofluorescence microscopy (IFM), indirect IFM, commercial ELISA systems, and non-commercial serological tests as well as the number of samples per year in all 34 university and 39 non-university dermatology departments. The overall return rate was 89%, 100% and 79% for the university and non-university departments, respectively. Direct IFM was the most frequently used method and was applied in 98% of the responding departments. In 74% of the responding departments, indirect IFM was used mainly on monkey
esophagus and human salt-split skin. Commercial ELISA systems were employed in 58% of the clinics; all of them used anti-desmoglein ELISA, while anti-BP180 and anti-BP230 ELISA were established in 49% and 48% of departments, respectively. Non-commercial analytic methods were only performed in 22% of the departments. The high return rate of this survey allows a relatively precise description of the current diagnostic methods used in German dermatology departments. Standard diagnostic tests are available nationwide and in bullous pemphigoid and pemphigus, the antigen-specific detection of autoantibodies is routinely performed in half of the departments. Rare disorders may be diagnosed by cooperation with some specialized centers.