SINPE
Società Italiana di Nutrizione Artificiale e Metabolismo

NATIONWIDE RESEARCH ON THE MANAGEMENT OF MALNUTRITION IN ITALIAN IBD PATIENTS

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BACKGROUND

Malnutrition in **inflammatory bowel disease** (**IBD**) is associated with reduced QoL, higher surgical risk, postoperative complications, and increased healthcare costs. [1] **ESPEN guidelines** recommend structured nutritional management and the use of **oral nutritional supplements (ONS**). [2] However, Italy lacks a standardized nutritional care pathway for IBD patients.

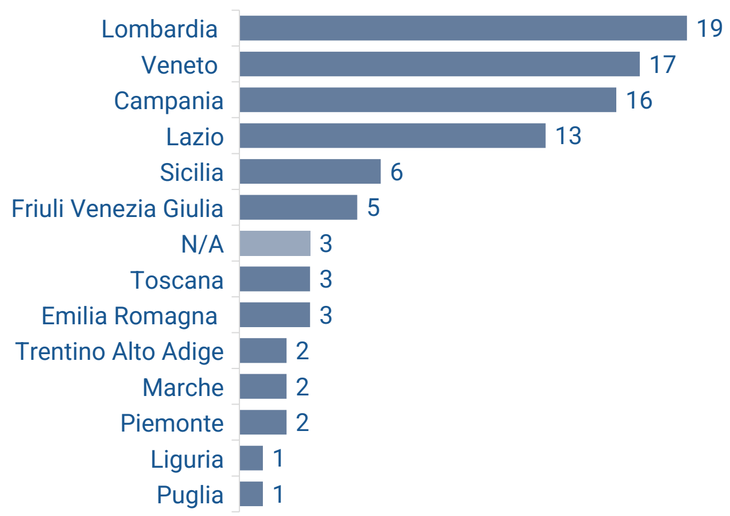
OBJECTIVES

- Investigate the **organization** of nutritional care and **regional disparities** in Italian IBD centres;
- Assess regional differences in **ONS reimbursement**.

METHODS

An online **survey** (Survio®, July 2–11, 2025) was sent to 300 HCP; respondents were **93 physicians** working in major Italian IBD centres. Respondents included specialists in Gastroenterology (51%), and Food Science (20%), Internal Medicine (10%), General Surgery (13%), Anesthesiology (2%), not defined (4%), distributed as in **Figure 1**. The survey explored: **number of IBD patients, prevalence of malnutrition, organization of hospital-based nutritional care, and ONS use and reimbursement.**

Figure 1. Respondents distribution by Region (n=93)

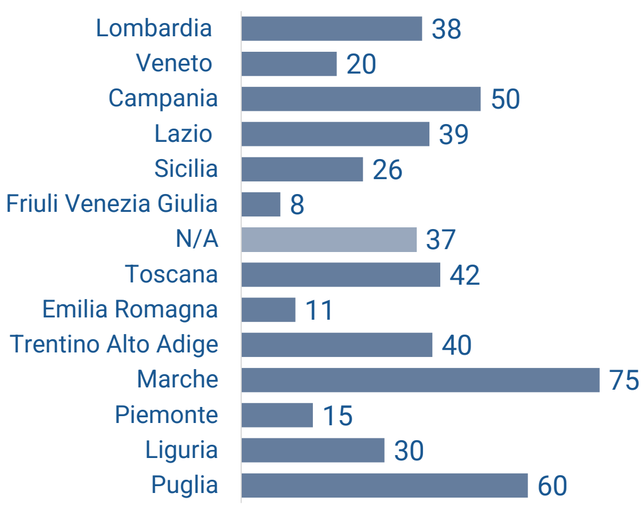


RESULTS

1. Organization of nutritional care and regional disparities in Italian IBD centres.

Malnutrition The 93 respondents manage 7,386 IBD patients/month. The overall **malnutrition prevalence** was **35%**, slightly higher but consistent with published data (13–27%) [1,3,4], with marked **regional variability** (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2. Prevalence of malnutrition among IBD patients (% by Region)



Clinical nutrition department Across Italy, **19% of centres lack a clinical nutrition service**, 15% have a complex unit, and 66% a basic unit (**Table 1**). **Nutritional screening** is performed in 70% of centres, with the highest rates in **Lombardia** (95%) and **Campania** (75%) (**Table 2**). However, screening does not always align with the presence of a clinical nutrition service (e.g. Veneto), report low screening (**Table 2**) despite established units (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Presence of Clinical Nutrition Unit in IBD Centres (% by Region)

	No	Basic unit	Complex unit
Italy	19	66	15
Lombardia (n=19)	16	68	16
Veneto (n=17)	35	53	12
Campania (n=16)	13	81	6
Lazio (n=13)	31	31	38
Sicilia (n=6)	33	67	0

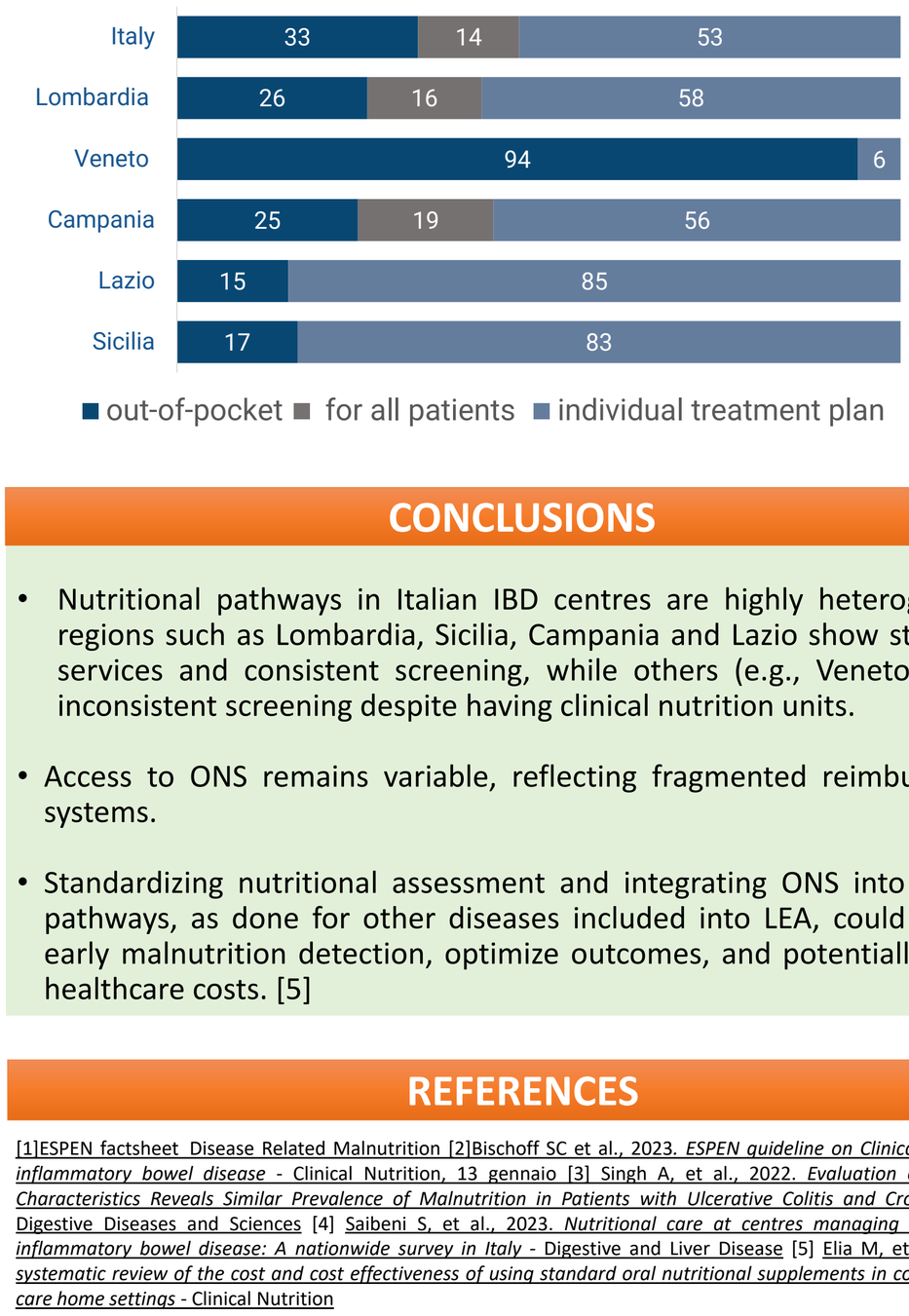
Table 2. Nutritional Screening in IBD Centres (% by Region)

	Yes	No
Italy	70	30
Lombardia (n=19)	95	5
Veneto (n=17)	35	65
Campania (n=16)	75	25
Lazio (n=13)	69	31
Sicilia (n=6)	83	17

2. Assess regional differences in ONS reimbursement

ONS reimbursement According to ESPEN guidelines, ONS are the first step when medical nutrition is indicated in IBD [1]. Despite their central role, reimbursement remains heterogeneous across regions: in **53%** of cases, ONS are reimbursed through an **individual treatment plan**; in **14%**, they are **reimbursed** for all patients; and in **33%** of cases they are paid **out-of-pocket** (Figure 3). To note, reimbursement varies widely even within the same region (e.g. Campania, Lombardia and Lazio).

Figure 3. ONS Reimbursement Pathways (% by Region)



CONCLUSIONS

- Nutritional pathways in Italian IBD centres are highly heterogeneous: regions such as Lombardia, Sicilia, Campania and Lazio show structured services and consistent screening, while others (e.g., Veneto) display inconsistent screening despite having clinical nutrition units.
- Access to ONS remains variable, reflecting fragmented reimbursement systems.
- Standardizing nutritional assessment and integrating ONS into national pathways, as done for other diseases included into LEA, could improve early malnutrition detection, optimize outcomes, and potentially reduce healthcare costs. [5]

REFERENCES

[1]ESPEN factsheet Disease Related Malnutrition [2]Bischoff SC et al., 2023. *ESPEN guideline on Clinical Nutrition in inflammatory bowel disease* - Clinical Nutrition, 13 gennaio [3] Singh A, et al., 2022. *Evaluation of Nutritional Characteristics Reveals Similar Prevalence of Malnutrition in Patients with Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn's Disease.* Digestive Diseases and Sciences [4] Saibeni S, et al., 2023. *Nutritional care at centres managing patients with inflammatory bowel disease: A nationwide survey in Italy* - Digestive and Liver Disease [5] Elia M, et al., 2016. *A systematic review of the cost and cost effectiveness of using standard oral nutritional supplements in community and care home settings* - Clinical Nutrition

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